Women of Assam

E. Elizabeth Vickland

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WOMEN OF ASSAM

ASSAMESE MOTHERHOOD

WOMEN OF ASSAM

By E. ELIZABETH VICKLAND

Author of
"Through Judy's Eyes," "With Christ in Assam"

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To the
Woman's American Baptist Foreign
Mission Society
and to
My Constituency
The Loyal Women of Our American
Baptist Churches

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PREFACE

I HAVE written this volume to introduce to my American friends the women whom I have learned to call my friends here in Assam. I do not know all the groups of women in this wide province. I have met and known intimately only women of the upper classes, Hindu and Mohammedan, whom the contacts of eight years have made very dear to me. I have taken rich gifts from their hands, I have known real fellowship with many of them, and I trust I may have been of help to them in return. The light of their womanhood is no less bright because it is hidden. They have been terribly handicapped, brazenly maligned, shamefully betrayed, sadly cheated. Despite it all they have and are achieving freedom and progress. We must judge them—if we dare act as judges—not by what lies ahead to be accomplished, but by the distance they have already come.

The volume is not by any means an exhaustive study of Indian womanhood. Such study has already been made by those who are better qualified than I. Neither have I tried to enter into the details of their worship, the inner significances of their creeds, or the meaning of their customs. Exhaustive treatises have already been written for such as wish to go further into these matters.

I am indebted to many for help in this work: To Miss Linnie Holbrook, of Tura, Assam, for the chapter on Garo women; to Mrs. R. B. Longwell, of Impur, Assam, for that on the Naga women. The story would be sadly lacking if the women of the Assam hills had been left out, for theirs is a thrilling record. I acknowledge my debt to Mrs. W. S. Urquhart, of the Scottish Mission Churches' College, Calcutta, for her review of my chapter on the Hindu woman's religion; to Rev. and Mrs. S. A. D. Boggs, for reading and criticizing the content of the manuscript as a whole; to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, Professor in Cotton College, Gauhati, for his help with the historical backgrounds; to our matrons, Jointi Zillie—now deceased—and Hadori Gogoi, for invaluable information on many points; to Anondi Kenowar, B. A., and Annie Gogoi, for translation from the Assamese of certain materials: to Srimoti Hemoprobha Das for the use of the manuscript of the address given by her at the Jubilee of the Nowgong Girls' School; to many other Indian friends who have helped in various ways.

Further, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the women of Assam for their friendship. They have opened for me many new windows upon life, deepened my faith in the innate fineness of all womankind, and inspired me to greater achievement in my personal living. I am indebted to you, my constituents, for the

opportunity of living in the "Land of the Bulbul," for the prayer and love-support that has made it possible for me to know the women of Assam.

Such debts are hard to liquidate. Perhaps if you can meet each other—women of America and Assam—in the pages of this book, and learn to love and understand each other better, I shall have done all I can in the way of getting even. You will find my Assamese friends struggling fellow women, achieving gloriously amid many difficulties and tremendously worthy of your love and friendship for the difficult days to come. You will be led to help life take wings in still another corner of the wide world, and this in itself will be your great reward and mine.

E. Elizabeth Vickland.

Nowgong, Assam, India.

INTRODUCTION

Assam is one of the little-known countries, but one of unusual interest and attraction to those who have given time to the study of its people and its natural features.

The story of missions in Assam is one of adventure and romance. We are especially grateful that our Baptist Board has taken the lead in the Christian development of Assam. The missionaries have been, in the main, of the very highest type, willing to sacrifice, to bear loneliness, to suffer ill health, long separation from home and friends. The results in the redemption of some of these savage tribes have proved again the power of God through the gospel of His Son Jesus Christ.

Baptist women who have loved Assam and its missionaries will find in this book much valuable material on every page; others who know less of the country have the opportunity to study at first hand through these chapters the real life of the women of Assam. We owe a debt of gratitude to Miss Vickland for her painstaking service and the valuable material which she has brought together in this little book.

Introduction

We have read the account of the arrival of Lindbergh in Mexico after his heroic flight. There is something infinitely more daring and heroic in the lives of such women as Miss Holbrook, Mrs. Longwell, and their associates.

LUCY W. PEABODY.

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I

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

It was the first time I had ever entered an Indian home. The invitation came from the young husband whom I was helping with his shorthand by giving him dictation practise. He was preparing himself for a much-coveted post under the Government.

They had evidently made much preparation for our coming. Emerging from the dark, warm night, we found the house cool and fragrant. We were ushered first into the little reception-room where the master of the house is wont to receive his guests. On the table was a great bowl of roses. The whitewashed walls were covered with gaudy pictures—some English calendars, and the rest mostly religious in character, depicting in marvelous fashion the exploits of their blue-skinned, hero-god, Krishna. In one corner stood a large, white image of a woman with a musical instrument in her hands. She seemed to be emerging from a great lotus. This, we were told, was an image of the goddess Saraswati, patron of beauty, music, and learning.

We were asked to sit in the two chairs, one on each side of the table. Our host seated himself oppo-

site us. We talked of generalities, in rather a halting fashion, to be sure, as his English vocabulary was about as limited as ours in Assamese. Presently a servant entered with a silver salver of spices—nutmegs, cinnamon bark, licorice root, cadamum seeds, and cloves. Spices are always offered to guests in an Assamese house.

Then the babu rose and said that his mother (not his wife, mind you) was awaiting us and would we please accompany him to the ladies' quarters. We crossed an open courtyard which was enclosed by buildings on all four sides. We entered a door opposite the one from which we had emerged.

A wrinkled old woman approached and salaamed low, with palms folded close. The babu turned us over to her care, and she beckoned us to follow. We entered the house, and then it was I saw the most exquisite woman I had ever seen. She was standing just inside the dark curtains that hid the entrance from the middle room, the light of a flickering lamp held by a servant woman falling full upon her face, a face whose perfection of feature was accentuated by the beauty of her bright, long-lashed eyes. Her smile was radiant and revealed perfect teeth. She was small, slim, and exceedingly graceful. There was a glitter of gold and jewels among her draperies. Later, in the lamplight of the women's apartment, I discovered

that those draperies were of rich, cream silk, embroidered in gold. Her wrists were encircled with broad, ruby-studded bracelets of rare workmanship. Around her throat a filigree collar glistened with rubies and pendant emeralds. From her ears hung garnet drops encased in gold, a gold bar brooch held her *riha* in place on her head, though it slipped back enough from time to time to reveal the perfect marcelling of her dusky hair, and the red *tilak* in its parting which is the marriage sign. On her feet she wore the heelless slippers of the country, and when she seated herself later she slipped them off showing small, exquisitely shaped feet, manicured and tinted on the soles with henna. Her garments gave off the sweet scent of musk. As she gave the graceful greeting of the country I fell in love with her and with the womanhood for which she stood.

At one end of the room into which we were ushered stood a great carved teak-wood bedstead, with a mosquito-curtain tucked over a frame above. There were great bolsters on it, and heavy comfortables spread smoothly. On these lay a lusty baby of eight months, chuckling to himself as he pulled at his pinky brown toes. He was a beautiful child. His only garment was a green wool jacket. Around his chubby wrists were red glass bangles. When he saw us he smiled a charming baby smile, showing two tiny teeth on the lower

gums. We wanted to pick him up, hug him, tell his lovely mother how perfectly adorable he was, but we had been warned that such actions sometimes greatly disturb a Hindu mother, for they are afraid that lurking evil spirits will do something to spoil the beauty of a child out of sheer jealousy. We admired the lad in silence, and the mother understood, for there were tears in her eyes as she looked up at us. There were tears in my eyes, too.

By this time the chairs had been brought from the master's reception-room. We seated ourselves and looked about the room. I was frankly disappointed, for I had expected to find luxurious couches, heavy rugs, velvet draperies, and a smell of sweet incense pervading everything. But here we were seated on stiff European chairs, looking at the rows of gaudy pictures on the walls and the cups and saucers, tumblers, and knickknacks on the shelf in front of us. The floor, guiltless of covering, was of smooth cement. Save two or three low stools there was little else in the room save the bed—the chairs and table having been added for the occasion. Everything was very clean. I was to appreciate later the wisdom of such utter simplicity in a land where Nature is so riotous.

Our hostess seated herself on a low stool at our feet. She was very quiet and wore a dignity that might have been misunderstood by us had it not been for her

disarming smile. She told us that she had come as a bride two years before. Sometimes she was very lonely and missed the large household of which she had been a member. She did not know many people. Being in purdah she did not go out very much. It was better since her boy had come. She was so glad we had not despised the invitation to her humble home and hoped we would come often.

The mother-in-law had retired to another room, and entered abruptly at this point. She had changed her clothes, and also her manner. It was hard to realize that she was the same humble, cringing creature that had met us a few moments before. At her entrance the daughter rose and stood with downcast eyes till told to be seated. The elder woman was not so attractive as the younger. She seemed harsh in her manner toward her, perhaps because she was a wee bit jealous of her beauty, or because she felt it her duty to discipline her. The old lady was short and stocky, her face very wrinkled, and her hair streaked with gray. Though her garment was of silk it was without a border, proclaiming a certain carelessness as to matters of dress so often characterizing the older Assamese women.

Presently the daughter left the room, and we were subjected to cross-questioning by the old dowager. She was rather imperious in her manner, but she did

not mean to be rude. She was not unkind, really, but used to deference.

The younger woman returned, followed by a servant bringing tea. On a huge, shining brass tray were piled many kinds of sweets and cakes. The younger woman told us that she had made some special sweets for us, for she had heard that we had never eaten them, and she wanted us to taste them first in her home. Setting the tray on the bed, the maid went to fetch another table, which she placed in front of us, laying a gaily embroidered cloth on it. The tray was set on the little table, and then there were brought to us two huge teacups full of steaming tea. From a brass vase they poured water over our right hand, and the mother-in-law wiped it with a hand-woven towel.

The towel brought up the subject of weaving, a subject dear to the heart of Assamese women. They told us that no Assamese girl would dream of getting married if she had not a generous hand-woven trousseau. We begged the younger woman to show us hers, and she left the room to bring it.

The older woman importuned us to eat. We had been warned that we would have to eat with our fingers, and that on no account must we soil the left hand. So we—or, at least, I—picked up most gingerly a white sweetmeat dripping with syrup, and took a wee bite. It was quite sweet and otherwise almost tasteless, being

made of curds. I picked up my tea-cup hoping to remove the sweetishness from my tongue. It was rather a test, too, for I loath milk in tea. I found the tea also very sweet, but it was spiced so it was not unpalatable. There were many kinds of sweets and cakes to sample, the old dowager pointing out which one to eat after which. One kind was like a pretzel, boiled in syrup; another made of clarified butter and sugar which was very crumbly, another of brown sugar, another of coconut, pastries that contained sweets inside and some that were stuffed with peppery concoctions. Last of all there were two bona-fide bonbons wrapped in silver paper. We managed to eat a piece of every kind on the tray, and still the mother-in-law chided us that we had eaten so little. Such was their idea of hospitality.

By this time the young woman and the maid returned, their arms laden with lustrous silken garments. Her wedding dress was a straight skirt of cream silk, heavily embroidered in gold thread in figures like those on grandmother's Paisley shawl, figures the Indians say are the footprints of Krishna. A jacket of the same material was bordered with gold embroidery around neck and sleeves and a *riha* of fine gauzelike silk, woven in stripes, with rosebuds of gold scattered over it. The *riha* is a scarf draped once around the waist, then over one shoulder and over the head.

"Oh, may we see your wedding jewels, too?" we cried. The old woman had already brought them out. Being the presents of the groom for the most part, it may be she felt a special pride in them. They were kept in a silver box lined with red satin. There were broad gold bracelets with filigree roses in clusters. These were set with garnets. There was a solid gold bead necklace with a flat, almost heart-shaped pendant set heavily with red stones in quite a raspberry-seed effect. There were other dainty necklaces, dainty chains with pearl pendants, gold beads exquisitely chased, and a very elaborate one with a shower of golden rose clusters hanging from it. Some more bracelets were uncovered, two pairs very thin and dainty, and one pair tubular and rather heavy. There were several rings, of pale Indian gold, which is said to be the purest possible, having no alloy to redden it. These were set with turquoises, rubies, and emeralds, and one had a solitary diamond. There were two sets of earrings, one the bottle-stopper-shaped ones that are truly Assamese, inherited from her mother. These go with the bead necklace with the studded flat pendant, being set with rubies in the same manner. These are rather too heavy to be beautiful in our eyes. The other pair were studs, marguerites with diamond centers.

They showed us her bridal shoes, crimson velvet embroidered in gold beadwork. They spread the rich

stuffs on the bed, dozens of silken garments, plain and embroidered, *sarees* of delicate hues in brocaded satins with glittering borders, lace and embroidery trimmed jackets in colorful fabrics, *rihas* of pineapple silk and chiffon, shawls of heavy wool with rich embroidery, petticoats with hand-made and store lace, and other garments dear to a woman's heart. She was very proud of the array, this Indian daughter of Eve. Even the old lady forgot to be stern as she stroked the lovely textures, her face relaxing into a tenderness that gave hint of beauty possessed in the long ago when she, too, had known the delights of bridal clothes and a wedding-day. The poor serving woman stood agape at a distance.

The young mother then picked up her greatest treasure, her baby, and held him very close. I wished that a Coreggio or a Murillo might have seen her as she stood there, looking down upon her child with melting mother love in her eyes, her soft silken draperies falling in billows from her shapely head to her hennaed feet, and the lamplight shedding a radiance that was akin to the aura painters place about the head of the Virgin. They couldn't paint a madonna without a halo. What a picture she made. There was a shine on her face that for a moment seemed unearthly. Even the old dowager noted it and stepped back, awed. Only a moment the spell lasted. She put the babe back on the

cushions, and picking up a silver scent bottle sprinkled us with perfume.

A few moments later we left—profuse salaams on their part and promise to come again on ours. The lantern carried by our servant was superfluous so we bade him put it out. The night was moon-flooded, the clustered palms stood out in bold silhouette against the silver of the sky. It was too beautiful to spoil with words, seeming a continuation of the magic hour behind the scenes.

Into my heart had come a vision of the really lovely souls of Indian women, the brave bearing of social crosses, the deep appreciation of beauty. I resolved that at any cost I would get close to these women, for I felt they had much to give me out of the rich stores of their innate womanliness.

II

SETTINGS: ASSAM, AND THE ASSAMESE

Assam

A land of mystery and charm, the Vidharba of India's sacred books, the stage of hero exploits of ancient folk-lore.

More specifically: the most northeastern province of India, tucked wedgewise between Bengal and Burma. A vast, fertile, emerald plain, spreading from the sandy shores of the sacred Brahmaputra—whose name means "Son of God"—north to Himalayan foot-hills and south to the little sister rivers of the Surma system and beyond into rugged upland country. One of the pathways of civilization into and from Central Asia.

Rolling hills, soft feathery bamboo forests, stately palms silhouetted against flaming sunset skies. Wide red roads skirting the hills and crisscrossing the level country. Rice-fields flooded with silver giving place in season to waving green seas of paddy.

Clusters of cozy mud-and-thatch villages, squatting comfortably in the shade of mango and tamarind topes. Rude craft plying the rivers, dugouts, sampans, tiny sailboats, and lumbering junks carrying jute and pottery. Lines of slow-moving oxen, tika gharries,

harassed and vexed by the newly acquired Fords of a Western country. Cows sauntering home at eventide, whose very dust makes the evening sacred and gives it its name.

Country folks jogging to and from market with their goods on their heads, graceful women bringing the household supply of water in gleaming brass jars on head and hips. Pungent smells of curry and rice. Song in care-free abandon.

Temples hidden in jungle shadows, "houses of the name" of bamboo where the folks go to see enacted the ancient religious plays, to hear the singing of a wandering minstrel bard, and to discuss the petty politics of their communities. Silver bells and bronze gongs announcing the hour of service within. Heavy incense from wayside shrines making fragrant the evening air.

Holy men, sitting by smouldering fires, basking in their voluntary wretchedness, sincerely held in reverence by simple country people. Long lines of them, naked, or swathed in *sappon,* shaggy and utterly unkempt, wending their way single file to proud, golden-crested Mount Kamakhya, joining the never-ceasing procession of other pilgrims from every corner of Hindustan, to pray at her sacred shrines and add to their merits by the hardship of the journey thither.

Mosques, gleaming white in the luminous moonlight, standing cold and aloof from the thronging multi-

VILLAGE WOMAN WEAVING

tudes passing by. Wrinkled, bearded muezzins mounting their roofs by weary staircases to call the faithful to prayer in the name of the Prophet, to rest their souls in the midst of the bustle of life in a moment of adoration of Allah, who is, to them, "the only true God and Mohammed is his prophet."

Warm fragrant nights with low-hung stars almost within reach; or fog-shrouded in the cold season, when people find campfires in open courtyards or cook-house fires within alluring. Or nights of rain and thunder and lightning when the countryside rocks and the people's hearts stand still in fear. Or silver nights, when the land is transfigured into a Paradise.

Throbbing tomtoms, at wedding-feasts, poor child brides awaiting their appointed hours with restless, trembling dread; or at the house where the death angel has called—leaving wailing, tearing of hair, and utter prostration of hopeless grief in his wake.

Dark, stuffy zenanas full of wan, listless women—a world of unsensed tragedy and suffering. Poor, cursed widows dwelling apart, stricken mothers-of-girls shrinking in the shadows.

Gods of wood and stone which hear not nor see. Endless ceremonies and rites, worship mingled with fear and superstition. Priestcraft, violent or sly. Spiritual darkness. Religion a burden. Life fast in the hands of an inscrutable Fate. Caste paralyzing all

of life with its irons. Pestilence that walketh in darkness.

Farther out, bordering on the vast Hindu and Mohammedan plain, the hills—noble staircases to the snowy heights of the mysterious Himalayas. Dense jungles, tortuous, precipitous trails. Settlements of mountain folks on the ridges, aliens from Mongolian lands. Haunts of cobra, tiger, and leopard. Tragic visits of the "river god" bringing terror and vengeance—messenger of an angry spirit. Dumb worship of the non-understandable works of nature. Cruel demons standing alert to baffle human endeavor. Farther in—warfare, victories numbered by human skulls.

Assam, fairest province of India, part and parcel of her teeming life, yet unique in genius and fascination.

Assam, where the sun never shines on drought-devoured fields, where the famine ghoul never stalks on the highways. Assam, where nature aids man to the point of pauperizing him. Assam, whose ancient splendor of rule and organization is still sung by the bards, now the home of millions of aliens come for war or peace and assimilated in its beneficent atmosphere.

The Assamese

There is an analogy between the Assamese and the American race. The present population is certainly

as conglomerate, the whole of Hindustan and nearer Asia having added from time to time contributions to its life. It is estimated that eighty-five languages are spoken within its borders, and I suppose no one knows how many dialects. But the descendants of the original Assamese stock number only seventeen hundred thousand souls out of seven millions.

History relates the gradual conquest of the inhabitants of northern India by the Aryans. These Aryans absorbed or conquered the aboriginals. The Assamese race seems to have been the result of the Aryan conquerors with the original people of the Brahmaputra valley, and later fusions have taken place so that almost any one who speaks the Assamese language may nowadays be called Assamese. The early race had a wonderful history, were well versed in the ways of good government, were zealous for the arts of life, and imported from time to time those who could give them the treasures of thought and customs of other adjacent lands. The kingdom of Kamrupa was a model of organization, prosperity, and culture in early times.

Then came warfare and the inpouring of conquerors from other lands, notably the Ahoms from beyond the Himalayan foot-hills eastward, and later Burmans brought reverses to the famous kingdom, and order was only restored when yet another alien race, the British, took control. It is now one of the four prov-

inces having the highest status in the country, being ruled by a governor, directly under the English crown.

The Assamese is peace-loving, quiet, and docile. He is considered rather lazy, and there are those who fear that the more energetic Bengali is gradually stealing his land. Hordes of immigrants are pouring into the country, taking possession of the fallow fields left vacant since through the abolition of slavery landed aristocrats were without help in tilling them, and were themselves unfitted to be farmers, either because of a lack of skill or inclination. They do not make good servants as menial service is beneath their dignity. They prefer tilling their own lands, or the gentler work of teaching, or office employment, to trade and barter. Not many of them are literary. Assamese literature is very scant. Their ancient scriptures and folk-lore are kept alive by oral recitation and memorizing by rote. The vast majority of the people are still illiterate, for only in recent years have schools on the Western pattern been appreciated and multiplied. The Assamese now appreciate education, and there are movements afoot to stir the production of literature, backed by an organization that will make it possible for an ambitious writer to publish books without personal financial loss and to circulate such productions. Today they are eager to assimilate the ideals and ways of modern India, to prove worthy of the responsibility

ORDINARY ASSAMESE WOMAN
Costume Worn When Working About the House

thrust upon them by the reform scheme of 1921 which placed great departments under their control. Gradually they are becoming more conscious of their connection with the great Indian race, a consciousness that cannot but bring stimulation and progress.

III

THE ASSAMESE WOMAN: HER SOCIAL STATUS, HER HOME, AND HER DAILY ROUND

Like all Indian women, the Assamese are small and delicately formed. The upper classes have fair skins, as fair as the complexions of Italian women. Their hair is abundant and blue black, sometimes inclined to curl a little. They keep it glossy and tidy by generous application of coconut oil. As to features there is much diversity, depending somewhat on the admixture of blood in the family. One sees many whose features are regular as the Aryan features, and these are apt to have great beauty. The Mongolian strain, coming by way of Ahom intermarriage, is commonly seen. Those who are Moslem may have the characteristics of the Afghan peoples—large eyes, often protruding, full faces, the eyes far apart. The immigrant women are apt to be darker. The Bengalis have smaller features and a duskier complexion as a rule than the Assamese. Those from Central India are very dark, but their features are small and regular.

I have spoken somewhat of the dress. Assamese women, as a class, are skilful weavers, and they favor

the cream-colored, hand-woven silks for the garments to be worn on dress-up occasions. These are elaborately decorated with designs in solid gold thread woven into the fabric. The Assamese costume seems to be a compromise between the Burman and the Bengali. The jacket and skirt seem to savor of Burma and the *riha,* or shoulder-and-hip drape, an adaptation of the Bengali *saree.* The saree is worn a great deal, too, though it is not draped as the Bengalis drape theirs. It is a strip of cloth five yards long and forty-five inches wide. It is cheaper than their own costume, which must be of silk, and not so bulky. The saree was brought into vogue by the coming of the Bengalis into the province. As is general in North India the white saree is preferred, with colored borders. At present there is a vogue for dark sarees. Girls who have come back from high school or college have introduced " Rit," and so from time to time our own campus blossoms out in delicate mauves, pinks, blues, and yellows, white voile being used instead of the regulation fabric.

Bengali women always wear the saree. It is the distinctive dress of their race. At social gatherings one sees ravishingly lovely ones in silk and satin in rich colors, draped to the point of absolute artistry. The dress of the upper-caste women of India makes us European women feel dowdy and ungraceful.

All Indian women are fond of jewelry, especially of the more ornate sort. It suits them, and one notices any lack of it immediately. The best jewelry is hand-made, of unalloyed gold. When one mingles with them, one feels like blossoming out in jewels and color, too.

They use much perfume of the heavier quality. It is sometimes overpowering in a gathering of Indian ladies. At weddings and often when calling they sprinkle one with rose-water through silver atomizers, and smear scent on one's clothes with their fingers.

As a people the Indians' taste goes to the ornate, elaborate, and colorful. It expresses itself not only in their clothing, but in the pageantry of their ceremonies, the richness of their food, and the elaborateness of their etiquette. The very shadows of their life are so deep that they give existence its rich tinge of seriousness.

Hindu and Moslem women dress alike if they claim to be Assamese. One sees many other varieties of dress, however, due to the great immigration from other parts. The Jain women wear brilliantly colored, and very full skirts, tight little jackets that only hide the breasts, and a shawl flung jauntily back over the head. Their jewels are very heavy, mostly of silver, and they wear quantities of it. Low-caste women—sweepers, dhobinis, and fisher-women—wear bright sarees and the short bodice of Central India, are tat-

VILLAGE WOMEN OF THE COOLIE CLASS, ASSAM
These Belong to the Immigrant Classes from Central India

tooed, and wear much jewelry of a variety of materials. F en the *bourka,* enveloping garment of Moslem women, common in Northwest India, is seen and adds another note of interest in the pageantry of dress. Slits covered with net enable women to see when wearing these garments.

Styles do not change in the main, though minor matters such as the length of the sleeve and collars or round necks, type of jewels or petticoat change from time to time. Flowers are never worn in the hair, for they smack of the nautch. Women from the cities or girls home from school set the pace in these matters. Coarse homespun cotton clothing is much worn since the Swadeshi propaganda.

The Hindu Woman

The Hindu woman has no status outside her caste and her home. Indeed the fulfilment of her duties in the latter constitutes her responsibility in the former. The family is the unit of society. All its laws and institutions were formed to keep the family intact. The joint family is the rule, and the line that counts is reckoned through the male side of the house. Polygamy, though not forbidden to Hindus, is not so much the practise as formerly, and not so extensively in the towns as in the villages. The failure of a wife to bear children is the chief reason for bringing a new

wife into the home. This is much dreaded by the women. Not long ago I attended the marriage of a little Hindu girl to her sister's husband. The sister wished it so and was in attendance at the ceremony. This was to avoid having a stranger come into her home. Cowives seldom live together. Many Hindu men have establishments in different towns, a wife in each. I am told that this sort of thing is on the wane in this province.

The sons bring home their wives to the ancestral roof where they must live under the domination of their mother-in-law. The Indian bride does not know the joy of keeping house "just for two" but becomes a part, and for a long time the least part, of her husband's family. We do not, of course, see any of the private life in the homes, for the moment we enter life ceases to be private. On the whole, however, one does not get the impression that Indian men are cruel. What seems so hard to us in their behavior toward their women folks is not always considered hard by the women themselves because it is according to the accepted way of things, set up and backed by their religion. To understand their view-point one must know the rules of their respective creeds.

The Hindus are very punctilious in the matters of usage. To err in a matter of etiquette is a grievous fault. To a Westerner their array of rules is for-

midable though the Indian excuses him from their observance. The Indian is not really burdened by them; they are inbred so thoroughly that every reaction is instinctively according to rule. Customs are exceedingly hard to circumvent, and form very real walls around the women.

Hindu girls, as well as Moslems, are married early, though there is an increasing tendency to push back the age these days. If marriage takes place before puberty, the child wife remains in her mother's home for a year or two and is instructed in the art of the home. Child marriage, even at fifteen, is cruel enough, robbing the girl-woman of her opportunities for education, and often of her health, making her responsible for human lives and destinies. One can see the necessity of the surveillance of an older woman, and it is her husband's mother who receives the prerogative. But when her children are born, if at all possible, she returns to her own mother for a time.

Repression is the rule of behavior toward women according to Hindu law. From childhood to old age the Hindu woman looks to some one else for her authority and guidance. Women must be kept quiet. They may speak to the men servants when necessary, but a well-bred woman is shy even with her brothers. She may not eat with her husband. If a third person enters the room she must withdraw unless he gives her per-

mission to stay. If the newcomer is a man, she quickly veils herself and leaves. She never addresses her husband in the presence of his mother. She never speaks of him directly; if there is occasion to refer to him she speaks of him as the father of her eldest child. She never sits in the presence of her mother-in-law. She never goes shopping. Well-bred women are never seen in the bazaar. Either merchants are asked to send their wares to her house for her inspection, or one of the men of her household undertakes to choose what she desires, be it personal clothing, jewels, or something for the house.

Family influence is tremendous. Any decision affecting a woman or girl is subjected for approval to a conclave of the entire relationship. Loyalty between the various members of a family is intense. The earnings and resources are pooled and the head of the house takes the responsibility of providing the necessaries from the common fund. (This tendency is preserved even among the Christians. Christian girls who have remunerative employment share their earnings most generously with their families. Sometimes we feel like raising a protest at this procedure, but always hesitate to do so. A common plea in asking for an increase in salary is that they must help support the family, a reason we cannot take into consideration as a basis of remuneration.)

Conduct in respect of family duty may certainly be described as three-fourths of the life of the ordinary Hindu. For the Hindu woman it is four-fourths. Apart from her family she has in orthodox society no place as an individual, while under the ancestral rooftree she has protection and a clearly defined position and its corresponding prestige. Outside its walls she feels no safer than in a tiger-infested jungle.[1]

Woman's work is to preserve the family line through the bearing of sons.

It is often said that behind the purdah the power of woman is supreme. But as far as this is true, it applies chiefly to women who happen to be heads of households. . . They never become mistresses of a house as we understand the word. . . There is a saying, "Woman's wisdom brings doom."[2]

She has never any recognized authority, even over her children. One can understand, then, how those who have had so little acquaintance with the idea of self-determination find it easy to decide that to follow custom is the only safe path. "To break seems a sacrilege, and few have courage to risk the unhappiness attendant upon such impiety." Herein lies the secret of the resistance to the gospel, not because it is hard for them to believe or because they do not appreciate the message, but because they fear the consequences of confessing to that belief and appreciation. There are many women in Hindu homes in Assam who are thus kept from aligning themselves with the Christians. I

[1] Urquhart. [2] Urquhart.

think God understands and accepts such devotion as they can give.

Moslem Women

One thinks of the Moslem women as against a background of curtains. The Hindu women were free in the olden times until the Moslem invaders came. These came without their families, and the beautiful Hindu women were coveted by them. So the Hindus hid their womenfolk, and the custom still persists. (At least that is one theory regarding the origin of the Hindu purdah system.) But the Moslem women were banished into seclusion by the holy scriptures of their faith. Woman must not show her charms, physical or ornamental. Her banishment has been utter and complete.

Hinduism has undergone many changes, but the fierce bigotry of Islam has admitted almost none. The Moslem woman of India lives under the same handicaps as her Arabian sister. Islam degrades her everywhere.

The Mohammedans are not a race of thinkers. They do not have the philosophical moods of the Hindus. For centuries they have followed their Prophet without questioning—for has not the final utterance been given to him?—have followed him with an obstinacy that has never dreamed of the need of reform. Only recently has any dissatisfaction been felt. There are signs of overturnings in the realms of Islam. Those of the

larger opportunities are not so sure of their Prophet's infallibility these days. But, practically speaking, the same shadows fall aslant the life of Moslem women today as in the seventh century A. D.

Polygamy and concubinage are common among Moslems. One does not ask who the different women one sees in a Moslem home are; one does not want to risk putting a finger upon a sensitive spot. But harder than the presence of other claimants to the husband's affection is the easy divorce to which a man has access. He has only to repeat the word *Tilak* three times to cast a wife utterly out of the house.

Dr. S. Zwemer says of this:

> The Moslem woman is the property of her husband, she exists to give him pleasure and to bear children. If she becomes incapacitated for this through ill health, due perhaps to her confinement in close, insanitary rooms, or because of the barbarous treatment of labor so commonly used, he may cast her aside, leave her to die, divorce her, or, at best, allow her a colorless existence in the household presided over by another wife.

Her status in the family is the same as that of a Hindu woman. She has no identity apart from the family of which she is a part. Her existence in this life as well as in the life to come is one of utter dependence upon her men folks.

There are those among the Moslem community who understand the seriousness of the situation. Mr. S.

Khuda Buksh, a graduate of an English University, a scholar and writer, says with regard to the Moslem woman of Bengal (our neighboring province from which many Moslems have come into Assam):

It is impossible to expect among a polygamous people that exalted idea of wedded life which we would expect and which we do, as a matter of fact, find among those who are monogamous. Take a European and an Indian home and see the contrast. The wife in the West is a friend, a companion, who is never in mortal terror of a rival to contest or supplant the affection of her husband as the wife in the East is. The Eastern wife may at any moment be dislodged by another and relegated to everlasting sorrow and perpetual gloom. The idea colors the whole life of our women. They are meek, submissive, humble, painstaking, patient, but that is, in most instances, not by choice but by compulsion. Polygamy and divorce go hand in hand. In Eastern Bengal divorce is the order of the day, and wives are put away as we cast off our old clothes.

Whatever may be the origin of the purdah, it is clear enough that it is founded in the belief, though not openly confessed, that women cannot be trusted to themselves, and that the female sense of virtue, piety, chastity, is too frail and feeble to withstand the temptations of free social intercouse. In no other light is the existence of this system to be explained or justified.

Only recently have Moslem girls in any large numbers been sent to school. Even so, very few are allowed to study beyond the fourth grade, for then they have reached the age of marriage. The illiteracy of Moslem women is appalling. "For Christians in India the literacy per cent. among women is eighteen per cent., among Hindu women one and one-half per cent. and

for Moslem women one-half of one per cent." Our Moslem sister sits in deep mental gloom, her position fixed and unalterable by social law, her soul cramped by the restrictions of religion whose formulæ have no meaning and whose expression is mainly the fear of evil spirits. Her lot is very hard. She has been and still is the most inaccessible. Only recently has there been any sign of weakening in the barriers that surround her.

The Assamese Woman's Home

Her home seems humble at first to Western eyes. There is none of the massive architecture one sees in the northwest, from pictures of which Europeans build up their ideas of the average Indian house. Most of them are low structures made of plaited bamboo strips, coated over with mud, and sometimes whitewashed. The floor is generally earthen, and the roof of thatch. The wealthier have cement floors and roofs of corrugated tin. The homesteads usually consist of four or more buildings enclosing a courtyard. One house may be occupied by the women, one is the kitchen, another the storehouse, and there is usually a weaving-shed, a guest-house, and a house for the animals. The floor, if earthen, is smeared weekly with a mixture of water, clay, and cow manure, which makes a hard surface over it, polished by the stress of bare feet.

The interior seems bare and inartistic to one at first, but after a steamy hot season spent in a European house crowded with things one finds the bareness cool and restful. After experience in fighting dust and germs they seem to one to be very clean and sanitary. There is generally a central room with mats and stools, or, if they have adopted somewhat of the Western mode, there is a table and a chair for guests. In the bedrooms, usually leading from the central room or from the verandah, one finds either wooden shelves wide enough for several people to lie on or wooden bedsteads with plaited tape or strings in lieu of springs, or just mats spread on the floor. In the better homes one sees mosquito nets in use, very useful in a land where malarial mosquitoes make life miserable.

One notices the smallness of the windows and that they are usually barred. Educated men tell us that the women folk are the ones who insist on keeping the windows closed. They think the night air unhealthful, full of evil spirits ready to jump down people's throats —for this last reason they also cover their heads lest yawning or opening the mouth in sleep, these spirits might get inside their bodies. There is much thieving, too, which adds to the reasons for the barring of doors and windows at night.

One misses pictures. The mass of the Indian people do not appreciate them. In Hindu homes one may find

flamboyant prints picturing the exploits of their gods and goddesses. In Moslem homes one finds no pictures, as a rule, so well do they keep the first commandment.

The kitchen is nearly always in a separate building. The stove is either a high brick platform with grooves for the wood, or simply some upright bricks set up endwise and covered with clay. These bricks form a rim to set the pots on. Arranged around the walls on shelves or on the floor is the family supply of cooking-vessels, generally of brass, the polishing of which is a daily and not irksome task. Earthen and brass water-pots hold the drinking-water.

In a Hindu home there is always some spot reserved for their gods or the god symbols. These may be niches in the wall, shelves in the kitchen, or cupboards. The *tulasi*—basil plant—sacred to Hindus, is found in every yard. Some homes have a private temple with a priest in attendance. In Moslem homes a prayer-carpet converts any spot into a place of prayer.

The Daily Round in an Assamese Home

The Assamese woman is a most devoted mother. The child rules her life, and she pays a most willing obedience. Most of the children are hopelessly spoiled, for discipline seems to the mother too harsh to be thought of. Boys and girls seem to be equally cher-

ished as far as my experience goes. I have seen no signs of special cruelty to girls because they are girls. The boy, of course, gets the preference when it comes to privilege and opportunity. Assamese children are most attractive and very lovable.

The Assamese woman of high caste or of wealth has very little more leisure than her low-caste sister who does all her own work. Supervision of servants often takes more time than to do one's work oneself. Judged by our standards, the Assamese woman is not a good housekeeper. There is no system about anything, and punctuality is not known. Her home may not be dirty, exactly, but it is almost sure to be untidy. Battered and broken furniture and knickknacks, such as an American housewife would relegate to the rubbish-heap, are given place even in the best homes. Curtains hang crookedly and are apt to be terribly finger-marked. Beds are seldom made. Mosquito-nets are allowed to become disgustingly dirty. The family clothing is strewed everywhere. One groans inwardly to see costly sarees in a heap on the floor or thrown carelessly over a clothes-rack. Shoes are seldom polished, at least not the children's. The children wear only one garment, often, and the whole back is exposed because of the lack of buttons. Rubbish-heaps are tolerated in corners of the rooms and in the courtyard. Everywhere are the red signs that show the promiscuous spitting of betel-nut.

JANGDE
One of the Garo Girls' Teachers, Tura, Assam

As to her own person, the Assamese woman is careless after her marriage. Unless she is going out to some grand occasion, she is not expected to think about her appearance. If she is particular about her dress and hair some one is sure to suspect her of a secret lover.

But the kitchen is always immaculate. This is an injunction of religion. The pots and pans are scoured until they shine. The hands are made scrupulously clean before food is handled, and the nails are kept very short. The plates are cleansed both before and after meals. Water is poured over the right hand before they begin to eat. (It is not good form to use both hands.) I am never afraid to eat in an Indian home of the better class. The house may not be so neat and tidy, but the food and the utensils will be immaculate.

The cooking consumes a great deal of time. The spices must be freshly ground every day, the rice is hulled in the home either by a servant or the women of the family. The cooking apparatus and the stove are very inconvenient. The stove is low, and the cook squats on her haunches to tend it. Not more than two things can be cooked at once. They use wood which has to be chopped and carried in. Water is brought from the well or neighboring tank in jars. The foodstuffs are brought from the market and servants are notoriously dilatory. It is a good thing that under

such circumstances the housewife's temper is not one to chafe at delay, and that time does not count.

The staple food is curry and rice. The curries are like stews, seasoned with tumeric, onions, spices, and salt. The foundation is mustard-oil or clarified butter in which the vegetables that take the longest to cook are first fried. Curries may be made of vegetables, fish, or fowl. The upper classes never touch meat, that is, the Hindus. Even eggs are forbidden the twice-born, as they contain the germ of life. In the villages the old Vedic restrictions about eating are strictly enforced by the local priests, but the townspeople get out of hand in such matters and so there are many departures nowadays. Modern bakers supply bread and rolls to the Moslems and less scrupulous Hindus, and these are really very good. But the orthodox of both creeds prefer the chappatties—thin pancakelike wafers made of rice-flour and water, and sometimes a little ghee is added. They do not put salt into the food as we do, but place it on their plates and use it as required as the meal is served. They make many cakes and pastries, but none that require an oven. Baking is done on the bottom of a sheet-iron vessel, sometimes covered, and sometimes open if the pastry requires turning. They use no yeast, baking-powder, or soda. Their pastry is, therefore, heavy and rather unpalatable for us. They drink milk and tea in great

quantities. Spices are added to the tea, besides milk and a great deal of sugar. Once in a Moslem home I was served tea to which salt had also been added. They are very fond of sugar and make many kinds of sweets.

Much of their food is prepared by frying, ghee or mustard-oil being the medium. They use much puffed and popped rice, and parched peas and gram as tidbits. They make many kinds of pickles and chutneys to go with their rice. In the more progressive homes they use European "biscuits," that is, soda crackers and cakes and cookies put up in tin cases. They are familiar with Cadbury's chocolates, and many like cocoa, but they do not know how to make it properly. Soda-water is also much used during the hot season.

Serving is simple. The men eat first, and the women after they have finished. The meal is usually eaten on the veranda just outside the cook-house or in the open courtyard. When it is stormy they eat inside the cook-house itself. They squat on their heels on the floor on mats. The rice is dipped out of the pot with the hands, the women serving the men first before they eat themselves. Curry is served in little brass dishes. Chutney and salt are taken in little heaps on their plates, which are usually of brass or enamel ware, though sometimes plantain leaves are used. Before they eat servants pour water over their hands and a towel is

passed around. There are no knives, forks, or spoons. They roll the rice into a little ball, dip it in the curry, and with a deft movement of the middle finger shoot it into their mouths. They are very neat, it being a mark of ill-breeding to scatter food on the floor. If chappatties are eaten they wrap curry in bits of them, making little parcels. They do not talk when they eat. They eat very fast. The meal has never developed into a social function with them.

With their own people the Hindus are very hospitable, though there are restrictions even within their own caste as to whom they may entertain or with whom they may eat. Only those branches of the family who have the same *guru*, or spiritual adviser, may partake of food together. The Hindu woman is taught by her scriptures to be hospitable.

> She must radiate kindness, and though shy and nervous at times, never fail to give an unmistakable welcome, for she looks upon it as a duty truly religious to do her utmost for the provision of comfort for her guest. . . A Tamil poet voices this ideal: "A wife is she who although want is in the house, when relatives come to feast enough to drain an ocean, gently welcomes all and shines like a goddess of the house." [8]

The Moslems are more hospitable in the sense of inviting even us to meals. One afternoon I had the homes of six of our Moslem girls on my calling list.

[8] Urquhart, *Women of Bengal.*

ASSAMESE GIRLS SHOWING THE TWO TYPES OF DRESS

The True Assamese Costume Shown at the Right

According to custom I had sent word that I was coming. (They dislike to be taken unawares.) I was served tea in the first four homes in succession, tea with cakes, sweets, boiled eggs, potatoes, and English tinned cakes. I had to cancel the calls to the remaining two houses. They serve one with great ceremony, and, of course, we always ask the most honorable lady, that is, the eldest, to eat with us. The others serve us and overwhelm us with attentions and urgings to eat. If one does not do justice to what they have prepared they are hurt. They honor you when they ask you to a meal. They are dear, dear women. At the end of a meal they serve the spices. If one can take betel-nut with them "they spread the bed," as their saying is, which means that the center of the home is yours.

Weaving takes a great deal of time, for almost all of the household linen is produced, as well as the silken garments of the women. Nowadays the hand sewing-machines are common, and the women are learning to cut and make garments for the entire family. Many of them do embroidery work, which, at present, is at rather a crude stage. They crochet lace for their petticoats and tidies to hang over the chair backs, if they have chairs, and over the mirrors. These handicrafts are foreign and are learned from the girls at school.

There are numerous holidays for which to prepare special food, and the offerings of flowers in wondrous

garlands. Also it falls to the women to draw the symbols and the decorative enclosures for worship on such days, and to oversee the caring for any guests who may come.

In many homes nowadays one sees the little lap organ, which the ladies learn to play. A few can manipulate the stringed instruments, too. Gramaphones with raucous records are a source of entertainment of which they never tire.

The recreations of the Assamese women are found chiefly within the home. They know an amazing number of folk-tales and much fairy lore. They know how to tell fortunes to some extent. Bits of gossip are told over and over. There are always special occasions when relatives come, and the pleasure of the leisurely chat is nowhere better appreciated than in India. Weddings are the greatest events in their lives, and they never miss one if it is at all possible to attend. Then they have a chance to show off their finery, to see what the rest are wearing, and to hear enough to last them for zenana conversation for weeks to come. The public programs we give are well attended. It is a grave matter to see that no one is left out. Also, most households have a number of pet animals, and the babies, too, afford amusement. So with work and their childlike inventiveness the shut-in women do manage to fill their days.

The temper of the Assamese woman is variable. The ideal is the one of poise and supreme patience, but the ordinary woman is often passionately angry and most unreasonable. I have heard amazing, impatient words on the lips of the women I admire most, not in my presence, of course, but behind the purdah. Servants are treated with scorn and contempt. Their idea of a gentlewoman does not include courtesy toward inferiors. Their weakness is due to their environment which has little in it to lift them above pettiness, and also to the irritating influence of a hot, humid climate.

Very few of the orthodox women chafe at their imprisonment. They do not sense their limitations. To be "purdah" is to be aristocratic. They have never known anything else, and their seclusion is a mark of proper care on the part of their men. And certainly protection is needed in a country where men as a whole have not yet learned the real meaning of chivalry.

The life of a purdah woman looks inward. She knows nothing about the outside world and has no wanderlust to impel her forth upon new paths. The setting of her life is upon a very small stage, and the part assigned to her is often a petty one, but it has its moments of tension and dramatic interest, and life in either a Hindu or Moslem home has its rewards.

They are glad to receive us into their homes, these

Assamese women. If flustered, they do not show it. They greet us without apology, meeting us even more than halfway in friendly overture. That is, unless they suspect us of what in their eyes is an ulterior motive. Though they excuse us from the requirements of their own strenuous etiquette, it goes a long way with them if we can avoid being repulsive by our crudity. One must remember that the Indian lady never mentions her husband's name and dislikes to talk about him. It frightens her to have her children praised or to have her babies handled by us. They do not like to shake hands with us, that is, the Hindus, for we are beef-eaters, and as such our touch is contaminating. A Hindu will have to bathe and go through various ceremonies before she is considered clean again. They resent overfamiliarity on our part, and, of course, one would never enter any room unbidden.

The Indian lady has her reserves, and her customs are her religion. One must not force oneself upon her. We shall gain our ends much more quickly if we respect her reticences. We must not be abrupt or hurried lest we kill the delicate rootlets of a possible friendship. Above all, we must seek her confidence; she will be impressed with the message only as it comes from the lips of a friend.

IV

THE HINDU WOMAN'S RELIGION

Her men folks do not think she needs a religion, the more untaught denying her the wit to understand, and the rest any innate purity. The Laws of Manu are very explicit on these points.

> It is well known that women are naturally prone to do evil. They are devoid of all real affection, fickle in temper, and very fond of sexual intercourse. . . Manu has said that evil appetites, anger, deceit, love of dress and love of ease and sleep are the appointed lot of womankind, and, indeed, the Creator of the Universe ordained that this should be so when he first created them. They have no right to share in any Vedic rites. They are ignorant of the sacred books. They have neither intelligence nor bodily vigor. They are as impure as falsehood itself.[1]

She is allowed little ceremonies and chants, to worship from afar by mute folding of the hands, but she knows no mantras nor invocations. In the villages at New Year's time the women have a service of their own in the temple, but it is usually led by the village priests. In her heart the Assamese Hindu woman worships, but the worship is crude and unintelligent because she has not been taught. The gods of the house she

[1] K. MacFie's translation of *The Laws of Manu*, p. 84.

reveres with awe, she clings to them in fear rather than because they mean anything to her.

Husband worship is supposed to be enough for a woman. On him depends her status in existences to come. She is born a woman because of some sin in the past, she will be released from that state if she does her duty by her husband. Manu points out the Hindu ideal thus:

> Him to whom her father has given her, or her brother with her father's consent, let her honour while she lives, and when he dies let her never neglect him. . . Though ill behaved, though in love with another woman, or devoid of all good qualities, yet a husband must constantly be revered as a god by the virtuous wife. No sacrifice is allowed to women apart from their husbands, no religious rites, no fasting. As far only as a wife honours her lord so far is she exalted in heaven. A faithful wife who wishes to dwell (after death) with her husband, must do nothing unkind to him be he living or dead.[3]

It is very sad to see the pathetic worship of a dead husband by a widow. She makes a little shrine, with his photograph or some article of his dress in the center, and before it she arranges the flowers in approved fashion, burns her little ceremonial lamp and bows in worship.

The realest prayers the women offer are for sons, for thus they best please their husbands and fulfil their obligations to family and caste. Barren women pray to Kali or Kamakhya. Kamakhya has a special shrine

[3] K. MacFie's translation of *The Laws of Manu*, p. 85.

in a temple on Kamakhya Hill just outside Gauhati, and women make long pilgrimages thither from every part of Hindustan to crave the boon of children. The daily procession up the steep, stony path to that shrine is a sight to make angels weep. There are other deities also who are supposed to have moments of kind thoughts for women. The worship, as far as can be found out, is merely propitiatory, consisting of offerings and mute obeisance.

In strict Hindu households the observance, morning and evening, of the ritual homage paid to the household god is a prime duty for both men and women. This form of worship is carried on both in the homes of the orthodox caste people and in the public shrines and temples. It consists in offerings of food, flowers, fruit, sacred durra grass, sandalwood paste, and other things required by Hindu law, accompanied by appropriate mantras (invocations), the sounding of gongs and bells, the blowing of conches. The evening worship is simpler in form than that of the morning, the chief observance being the waving of lights in front of the idol. . . Cooked rice is offered only in Brahmin households. In all others sun-dried rice takes its place. The offerings to the household image are not made by the worshipers themselves, but by the family priest, who is a Brahmin. [Many homes do not boast a priest, so a member of the family, the eldest male, performs the ordinary daily ceremony, except on special days when an outside priest is called in.] . . . Beside the formal image of the god, the *tulasi* or basil plant, which is a favorite of Vishnu, is seen in most houses, and receives almost divine honours. To water it is a religious duty and a means of gaining merit. The women make offerings to it of flowers and rice.[8]

[8] Urquhart, *Women of Bengal*, p. 107.

Bengal is a neighboring province, and the practises of Assamese Hindus are practically the same.

In general, the religion of a Hindu woman in India may be said to be assisting in the preparations for worship, and then, when worship is carried on, she is a most reverent onlooker. Her religious instinct, however, has converted her daily round into a series of ceremonies. These mean mostly the invoking of good fortune. To the ordinary woman fellowship with God as we understand it is not thought of as even desirable. Her religious acts are, consciously or unconsciously, means of gaining merit to be used in her favor in another existence.

Part and parcel with the Hindu woman's religion is a vast mass of superstition, belief in omens, good and bad, and, to some extent, belief in evil spirits. Her bogey is the "evil eye." It is the woman who senses the omens of an occasion and performs the little acts calculated to rob them of their power. This cloud of superstition and fear darkens the minds of Hindu women, and the pathos lies in the fact that by their very love for their dear ones they are often hindered from following gleams that steal in from the world outside.

The fundamental ideas of popular Hinduism are far from those of Christianity. There is no idea of a sinless incarnation, though there is some notion of a

perfect, omnipotent Being ruling the universe. He is not personal. He is too remote to be influenced by the acts of ordinary men. The under gods are considered above the conventions of men and exempt from their laws. The stories of the exploits of some of these godlings are disgusting to us unless we understand this.

Sin is not a lapse from an unchanging standard: it is rather displeasing a capricious deity, or breaking a rule of caste. There is not much use to struggle, for an unchangeable order has assigned to each his place, this assignment being the result of a former existence, of which there is no memory. The life to follow the present one will be another stage, higher or lower in the scale, according to the merit gained in this one. Everything normal in human life is beset with lures to wrong-doing. Those who wish to better themselves do it by denying themselves the normal joys, creature comforts, and desires. Even to think is to be enmeshed in the snares of delusion. So better not to think. Thus yoga practises have arisen, long holding of the breath, banishing of thought, concentration of the gaze on particular points, fixity of posture. These lead to unconsciousness, often to a state of trance reckoned most desirable. There is no real prayer as we know it, only the mutterings of mantras in Sanskrit. Some are too ignorant even for this, and too poor for the services of a priest.

As a rule the women, rich and poor alike, must resign themselves to fate. If they can become the mothers of sons, they are promised the status of a man in the next life with the chance only a man has of satisfying the inner craving for God. If they do not have sons or are widowed early, there is nothing left save a life of austerity, within the home, or as the disciples of some guru, or as a pilgrim. (I know of two women who have devoted themselves to ministering to an ascetic, preparing his food, worshiping him.) Most women think the struggle a hopeless one and exist colorlessly. All their lives long they have never thought for themselves, have never handled, much less read, the holy books, nor even heard their counsels. When sorrow overtakes them they are apt to turn in their perplexity to any one in whom they can put faith. It is a blind faith, at best. Often it results in tragedy. Many unscrupulous ones there are who betray such faith for their own gainful ends.

We were sitting in a Bengali home one day, chatting womanwise of many things. Our hostess, a woman of unusual charm and intelligence—though she has never received the formal instruction of the schools—was showing off the pranks of a lovely baby boy. On the wall in front of me was an enlarged photograph of an old woman, evidently a widow, sitting on a deerskin

in a posture of devotion, telling her beads. When our hostess left for a moment to bring the spices, my companion, a Hindu girl, told me that the picture was of the old mother-in-law who had given herself up entirely to a life of meditation and devotion, and was now a famous saint. Just then another woman entered from an adjoining room, and, as she held back the curtain to let her toddling child through, I saw the woman of the photograph.

She was indeed sitting on a skin. (From Vedic times when holy hermits retired into lonely forest lodges, relying on their environment for the necessities of life, the deerskin has been considered the appropriate rug for meditation. All the holy men of the Sadhu class carry such skins with them.) She wore only the coarse cloth of the widow extending from her waist to her knees, one end draped over her head. This, having slipped back, revealed her shaven head. The upper part of her body was bare. Around her neck was a string of berries from a sacred tree, a necklace such as holy men are wont to wear. Her eyes were closed. She was fingering a rosary and muttering under her breath. Her body was thin and emaciated. Her face showed signs of patient suffering. Around her were brass vessels, a few frangipani blossoms and other paraphernalia of worship. I could not see whether there was a shrine.

I was not well enough acquainted with my hostess to ask questions concerning the old woman. Afterward I sought the meaning. I found that in Bengal and in Assam women may become devotees through a special initiation service conducted by the family guru. The ceremony is called "taking the mantra." It means that the disciple has been given the name of a deity to meditate upon, whispered in the ear and never under any circumstances to be revealed. A special incantation is taught, called "mantra." Mrs. Urquhart writes of this practise in Bengal:

> The god can be called by means of this mantra and must be so called at two periods every day, at least one hundred and eight times, by the telling of beads. The name—for there is a profound belief in the East in the magic of the uttered word—must be repeated so quietly "that the person herself cannot hear it." . . There is no limit to the number of times the name may be repeated during the day, and sometimes it is said thousands of times. The actual words of the mantra have no meaning in themselves, but are mere sounds such as "hoong, doong, hling, kling." For a symbol of the god a little brass cup, saucer, and ladle are used. Ganges water is poured from one to the other. At certain sacred seasons, a mud image is placed in the saucer to represent Siva. This is laved in water, and the emblem is a phallic one, but it is doubtful if the women have any idea of its significance.[4]

The devotion of Hindu women is amazing. I have met a great many women, especially in the villages, who have been on long pilgrimages. I have heard of others

[4] *Women of Bengal*, p. 109.

OUR FIRST "LADY DOCTORS"
Christian Girls

who have never returned from the sacred spots of Hindustan. I know that many women go from Assam to Benares—it is India's holiest city—to spend their last days there. Mayhap some of them were sitting in the long lines I saw in the temple alleys—women who lived by begging rice from the worshipers. I have seen women on pilgrimage walking hundreds of hot miles under a burning sun along the dusty highway. I have seen them, mostly old and decrepit, crowded back on station platforms by unsympathetic train guards, to wait another train because there was not enough accommodation for them, and the look of despair and bewilderment on their faces as they patiently settled themselves for the wait has haunted me. I have seen them, these pathetic figures, measuring their lengths on the roads, or sitting like other fakirs, in postures of agony by the waysides.

Even we who know how utterly futile their practises are, cannot but respect this devotion of their religious acts. How it hurts to reflect how cruelly they are cheated! We can understand, too, how these old women have for the simple people about them an aura of holiness because of their austerities and detachment from life. They have gone a little farther into the mysterious realm of religion than the others have, that realm into which there are so few doors for Hindu women.

It was a sunny morning in midsummer. We were at breakfast. Suddenly we heard the sound of distant singing, and as it drew nearer I asked the table boy about it.

"Oh," he said, "the sweeper women are collecting rice to offer the smallpox goddess. There is much smallpox in their community."

I went to the veranda. About forty sweeper women in brilliant red and yellow sarees, their heavy silver jewelry flashing in the sunlight, were coming down the red road that skirts our compound on the north. They were chanting, not unmusically, a weird strain. Sometimes they paused in their singing to chatter and laugh, and then they resumed their song. All through the Jain bazaar, through the Bengali section, and on to the Assamese suburb they went, stopping at the doors to beg rice for their goddess that the plague might be removed from their midst. Later I saw the image of their deity set up under a rude shelter with drummers and dancers performing before her. The doctors find it difficult to vaccinate these people. They consider such an act insulting to the goddess. If only they can make the right offering the goddess will protect them. And the conclusion is, if any one falls ill and dies, that either he had failed to please the goddess, or "Fate had written it on his forehead," and it was his appointed time to die.

Standing on the bridge over the Kullung River one evening at sunset time I saw a little ceremony on the part of the washerwomen. They came to the riverside chanting. By the waterside they planted three bamboo wands, and from one of them a little white flag was floating. Before the wands they arranged rows of white flowers, and on the wands themselves they hung marigold garlands. Little lamps were lighted and set on the ground. Then they bowed themselves and touched their heads to the ground, with their folded palms on their foreheads. Then they rose, gathered up the implements of their worship, and went away chanting. I have not been able to find out the meaning of the act. I only know that they were seeking help for some problem, or peace for an unexpressed tumult in their breasts, or, it may be, it was a duty to be duly performed, the meaning of which was not clear to the worshipers themselves.

On the outskirts of the town stands the temple of Sri Ram Krishna Paramhamsa. Inside the gods are arranged in a gaudy shrine, in front of which is a long shed with open sides and an earthen floor. Morning and evening the gods are worshiped here, and sacrifices are offered by attending priests, amid the fragrance of incense and the chanting of songs. Sometimes the hall is full of people sitting on the floor listening to one

called the *Bura Gohain* or chief priest. It is, perhaps, one of the most orthodox temples in the province. People come here from far and near. There is prestige and reverence for tradition made poignant by Swami Vivekananda, disciple of the founder of the Vedanta movement, whose name the temple bears.

The family of the priest are friends of mine. They are very élite, Brahmins of the Brahmins, and, besides that, trace direct lineage from the Ahom kings who made Assam famous five hundred years before the British came. I am always welcome here, probably because I furnish a diversion in the dull lives of the women behind the whitewashed stone walls.

As we sit and chat on the veranda crowds of emaciated old women come to stare at us. I used to wonder about them. At first I thought they were servants. Then, one day, I was told about them. They are devotees of the temple, disciples of the high priest, or wives of men who are disciples. They have come to observe in strictest manner the rules of their ancient faith, thinking that service and worship in such a place will bring a sure reward. These women prepare the sacrifices, clean the temple floor, smearing it daily with a mixture of mud and cow manure to make it pure. They are ascetic in habit, eating only one meal a day and that in the evening. Some of them have been initiated into that stage where they are allowed to

meditate upon the name of a god, like the Bengali women of whom I have spoken. Some of them are allowed inside the enclosure, being disciples, but none of them is allowed to enter the shrine itself or to touch any of the accessories of worship. The widows, of course, must stay outside. All of them are one in this, that they have given their lives in devotion to religion. They are making the most of their opportunities. If one could look into their hearts what life histories one would find and what longings!

They are taught that God is afar off, and only by the strictest holiness can one advance toward him. There is little hope that any ordinary mortal will ever attain to nearness, but there is at least the idea that such nearness is desirable and worth striving for. Only such women as have courage and force of character dream of striving. Sometimes, and perhaps most often, the striving is more or less unintelligent. The vast majority never receive any encouragement or see any way out beyond their limitations. They resign themselves to their fate of being women, not supposed to know about such things, and hope that in some way or other they may find their way through the next existence.

So woman in India has very little conception of the deeper meanings and values of religion. Often we feel that there is much they would like to express, but

the Hindu woman is strangely inarticulate about her hidden feelings.

There had been a Brahmo-Somaj Conference in town all the week. (The Brahmo-Somaj is a reform sect, seeking to promulgate the best in Hinduism, and to eliminate the objectionable. Hence they do not observe the rules of caste, do not worship idols, and give perfect freedom to women.) I had been specially invited, but day after day passed, and one thing or another hindered me. The little Bengali widow who sponsored the meetings was disappointed, I knew. So when it came to the last day I made a great effort and was able to attend a meeting advertised for women only. Three of my assistants accompanied me. The meeting-place was a half-finished building since completed and dedicated to the society.

Every one was sitting with bowed head when we entered. At the front, on a low dais covered with a gay rug, sat a woman in a saffron saree. She was also in the attitude of prayer and leading the rest, chanting the invocation singsong fashion. It lasted for some minutes, and was followed by an intense silence.

Two young girls came to the platform, and one of them picked up a lap harmonium. Both sang a sweet Bengali hymn of praise; sweet, but unspeakably sad. Confession of sin there was in it, too, and reliance upon the unseen, unknowable One in whose hands are

human destinies but who gives no assurance that he will take the responsibility for those dependent upon him. Those sweet young girls should have been singing of joy and hope and trust.

The singing over, the woman in saffron was handed a book and presently she announced that she was going to read to us from the writings of Keshub Chunder Sen, one of the leaders of the Brahmo-Somaj movement. She read sonorously, monotonously. I followed very little. Even in conversation I find Bengali hard to understand, for it is not my vernacular. After the reading which consumed at least half an hour she chanted another prayer, after which she pulled the little harmonium toward her and sang with great fervor. The women opened hymn-books and timidly sang with her. They thrust a book into our hands, but we did not know the tune. There was adoration of the lord of life, that is, the One whose life essence pervades the universe, vibrant in every living created thing, the lord of physical life. There was more, but I could not grasp it.

The singing over, our friend, the widow, stood up and faced the audience. She was a pathetic figure to me, with her clasped hands, her borderless saree, her earnest attempts to lead the women into some deeper experience. Though her family belongs to this progressive order, custom still rules their lives to a con-

siderable extent. This woman had to shave her head like all Hindu widows. The women around her wore many jewels; the only gold about her was the rims of her spectacles. She asked if any one in the room had any experience to relate or anything to say. She asked me first. I was, of course, wholly unprepared. So were my companions. No one volunteered. They were all progressives with leanings at least toward the Brahmo-Somaj, but they had nothing to say. They are not used to expressing themselves. Then the leader herself spoke, most earnestly. Her subject was the presence of God omnipresent in everything about us, in the air we breathe, in the sunshine about us, in the flowers we love, in the food we eat, in the people we meet, in rest and sleep and love and all things good. We should practise looking for him and realizing him.

The service closed with a benediction chanted by the woman in saffron. Afterward the women crowded around us. We chatted of this and that until the ox-carts, *tikas,* and taxis came to convey us all home. I was glad to have attended the service, to see how the bonds on the souls of women are loosening up.

The soul of India is seeking a medium to understand God better, the God of whom people know more since the schools are teaching science. They are learning the approachableness of God, that images and priests are unnecessary, that God has kind thoughts toward

women, and that all his creatures are brothers and sisters. The Brahmo-Somaj system has borrowed much from Christianity, and there are those who consider the movement a hindrance rather than a help in the progress of Christianity. It is, perhaps, a compromise between the new and the old. They do not understand Christianity very well, they are afraid it may lead to denationalization. God works in various ways to reach all men. If by the examples set and the stand taken by this movement India has an object-lesson to prove that men and women can work, study, and worship together, may we not have faith that God will use it to make the Christian message of the preciousness of the individual more intelligible? And, if precious, worth saving, and needing a Saviour? Certain it is that the people of this community are not afraid of the missionary. With them we can speak freely with some hope of being understood.

Saturday evenings I meet with a group of Hindu teachers and students living in our dormitories. They come from homes varying in enlightenment, even the best of which put restraint on the religious inquiries of their daughters. We have studied together Speer's *Principles of Jesus,* we have read together the record of the matchless life from the Gospel records. The girls have been impressed. Some are thinking deeply.

Their matron tells me they are examining their holy books and of the critical attitude they are assuming toward the practises and rules of their religion. Some are Christians at heart, lacking only the favoring opportunity to make it known. Most of them pray in His name. Now they demand to read the *Gita,* the beloved epic that is a handbook to the Hindu. They are far enough released from the old rules to be allowed to handle the book. There is something of a challenge in their demand, as if they were on the defensive, a position due to intense loyalty to their traditions. What harm can come from culling truths from a beautiful, ancient story? The Spirit of God will make the contrast between Gita and Gospel vivid and win them to the latter by its own sweet reasonableness.

They must be led gently, these child women of the Hindu race. Our girls come a long way when they deliberately choose to sing Christian hymns at our meetings, choosing such as "Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," "Shall We Gather at the River," "Trust and Obey," "Anywhere with Jesus," "Low in the Grave He Lay," and others. They always make the choice themselves. Sometimes they say heartily how good it makes them feel to sing songs like that. They bow reverently in prayer, and often they steal into the meetings of the Christians. When their hearts are troubled they come to us to pray with them in the

name of Jesus. They love Jesus—as all women do—because he is lovable. Of Christianity as such they are critical. But love leads to faith, and faith to salvation.

There come times too, when we sit in Hindu homes and an intimate tone enters the conversation. It may be there has been some sorrow or hard experience that has made the heart tender and wistful. Then it is they ask us to tell them the story of our Christ and what he can do for women. Then they open up like flowers to the dew. They listen unafraid and give close attention, for we are friends. These are the moments we work for, and they are worth patient waiting for.

Many women in Hindu homes find sweet comfort in Jesus. Hinduism as a system practised by the common people is more a matter of social observance than a creed. One may believe almost anything if one doesn't break caste, the laws of eating, drinking, and intermarriage. Girls who have been in mission schools have learned to think of God as a loving Father, a new idea to the Hindu. They have learned to pray as Christians do. Some of them make Jesus another one of their deities out of loyalty to the old, but they confess that prayer to Jesus brings comfort. Others go through the performances of Hindu worship outwardly but direct their thoughts to Jesus inwardly. Still others tell their people openly of Christ and their faith in him, even refusing to worship the family gods, and

their relatives pass it over so long as there is no talk of leaving their caste. Thus the witness of Christianity reaches many an obscure little village and hamlet. I believe God will use all these testimonies and will accept what faith they have. God understands better than we the cruel limitations put upon self-expression of any kind on the part of Indian women.

It is a time of transition. There are grave social upheavals, and religion, so intertwined with social usage, is also shaken. These feeble beginnings will bring results. Barriers are being broken down. Through the chinks pierced into zenana walls by the impacts of the new order the true light will enter darkened minds and homes. And the schoolgirls will, after all, be the most effective messengers of the gospel of the abundant life.

V

THE MOSLEM WOMAN'S RELIGION

The faith of the Hindu woman is like a tree which strikes its roots deep into the soil; as the number of its leaves, so are the objects of her worship for multitude. Her spirit dwells among them, spreads abroad, becomes extensive.

The Moslem woman is otherwise. Her faith is not of the soil. It came with her ancestors from a far country, and the Islamic faith, though aggressive, is essentially exclusive. It shuts her in. Confined to that part of the house from which no glimpse of the outer world can be seen, her spirit becomes intensive, but her gaze is not so much inward as toward the beyond. The carpet on which she kneels at prayer is marked like the Mehrab and points toward Mecca. She looks far away from the place of her birth toward the land of tents and wanderings. But her worship is not that of outward things. It is rather the concentration of the soul toward the Unseen, and this makes for strength of character and power.

As regards home life, the Moslem woman is not inextricably woven into the religious life of the people as is the Hindu woman. A devotee she may be, and bigoted she usually is, but this is the result of intense conviction, inherited from her militant forefathers. Her faith is not so much her atmosphere as her armor.

The Moslem woman is, generally speaking, descended from converts who accepted the faith at the point of the sword. Her practical religious observances have become modified in some ways, but in creed and intensity of her faith in the Prophet himself, she is at one with all her Moslem sisters throughout the world. Mohammed is the personification of her religion. She is its most faithful adherent, and yet there is no honorable place for her in

the religion of the Prophet. She is excluded from most of its privileges but from none of its penalties. She has a low place in its laws, but notwithstanding all disabilities, her devotion to the law-giver is complete. Asked why she trusted in the Prophet, seeing that as a woman she received so little from his religion, a Moslem woman declared her readiness to follow him anywhere and whatever the consequences. Others may hold the faith more loosely, but such as she form the type of all strict Moslems.

This devotion to the person of the Prophet gives the Moslem woman a fixity of purpose and a definite aim. There are no blurred outlines in the form of her creed as there are in that of the Hindu. For it is not Mohammedanism but the religion of Mohammed that covers her with zeal like a cloak; he himself is the soul of her faith. The Moslem woman expressed her personal character as well as the battle-cry of her people, when she said, "I will follow Lord Mohammed wherever he leads, even into Hell." She is shut in a prison house from which naught else is visible. She accepts and practises her faith in a spirit of simplicity and ferocity akin to that of the terrible wilderness from which it came.[1]

Backward as they are in education, the minds of Moslem women are not alert nor worried by thoughts. It never occurs to a Moslem woman to question the wherefore of what is required of her. There is no inspiration in her belief. It is as fixed as are her duties to her home and husband. She is not, as a rule, of a mystical temperament, and loses the joy which the Hindu woman gets by the use of her imagination as she tries to see God in all about her.

There are two sets of duties the Moslem woman

[1] A. T., *The Indian Child's Mother*, pp. 71, 72.

must perform. One may be called the Duties of Belief, and the other the Duties of Performance. The latter the woman must perform as well as the man. This is in direct contrast to the indulgence allowed women in Hinduism, where the man takes all the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his household. There are five acts compulsory with the Moslem woman: Daily recital of the creed, prayer five times daily (before sunrise, at noon, before sunset, after sunset, and when night sets in.) These prayers are set in form, the words being in Arabic. The woman does not know what the formulæ mean. She must fast thirty days during the month Ramadan. That means that during that month she partakes of no food until after sunset, the Moslem day, like the Jewish, ending at sundown. She must give alms on set days. She must, if at all possible, take a pilgrimage to Mecca. This last is not always practicable, but it constitutes the Moslem woman's great dream.

I have been in Moslem homes in late afternoons, and one by one the women have excused themselves to pray. I try not to call in prayer hours. Every morning the boys and girls are sent to the school at the mosque to be taught prayers and the creed in Arabic. The wealthier arrange for the maulavis to teach the children at home. The method is by rote. The formulæ are sacred, they do not need to be understood. The people,

as a whole, are ignorant of what the Koran contains, though they recite from it every day of their lives. Its language is abstruse; even the few who know the Arabic tongue find it puzzling in places.

"The book, the rosary, and the prayer carpet are the expression of her faith and the accessories of her religion." The woman does not attend the mosque, so does not hear the expositions by the maulavis on Fridays.

The Moslems, as well as the Hindus, are fatalists. They, too, repeat the formula, "It is written on my forehead, it cannot be altered." It is most often the woman's cry. She does not know the laws that govern the universe, the rules of health, of the care of children, of discipline in the home. Whatever happens as the result of ignorance is laid at the door of "kismet," an inscrutable force that baffles the human spirit at every turn. It hardens her and makes her stoical.

Superstition brings fear of every kind to haunt her mind. Every one believes in the "evil eye." Until one is sure they consider her a friend, one must be careful not to express anything that might be taken as a covetous wish. I was very much relieved to find that a Moslem woman whose three-weeks'-old baby I had held in my arms the week before it died did not blame me as having cast a spell upon it. She said it was kismet. What could one do?

The Moslem woman's world is full of evil spirits known as jinn. Hysteria is attributed to demon possession. One family was hard put to it to secure a husband for a daughter who had hysterics occasionally. They married her to an inferior man. She is more hysterical than ever. Of course they say it is due to jinn. To me she seems merely scared and nervous. There may be real reasons for her constant weeping and panics.

The Koran teaches the existence of jinn, and that, though mostly evil, they are given their place by God himself. The jinn are supposed to be endowed with supernatural powers. They are called forth by whistling or blowing a pipe. Graveyards and outhouses are their rendezvous. Formulæ to drive them out must be repeated on entrance. They are abroad at night. Hence the closely barred windows. Digging of wells and tanks are dreaded lest the jinn be disturbed. A storm is a conflict of jinn. The cock crows and the donkey brays when jinn approach. The wolf, the jackal, crow, and owl are the allies of jinn.

The Mohammedans believe also in familiar spirits that haunt children. Every Moslem child wears charms of various kinds to protect him from their spite and jealousy. Moslems are said never to injure a cat, for it is the abode of some child's double.

As to the future life, the Moslem woman hopes by

never displeasing her husband to meet him in Paradise, there to be one of the flawless harem, promised to all good sons of Allah. Even this seems to be dependent on the wishes of her lord. An old Moslem sheik once expressed himself as being unwilling for his own wives to be with him in heaven, for he preferred beautiful, clean angels.

"The privilege of prayer is practically denied a young woman with children because of the strict regulations of washing before prayer. Unless these ablutions are done carefully according to rule, prayer is void." Old women, unmarried girls, and brides who are childless are the ones who can best avail themselves of the privilege.

The Hindu woman is much more easily reached than the Moslem. There are more points of contact, and she is more ready to grant that all religions may contain truth. She is not prejudiced against the Christian. She is more curious, too, and ready to ask questions. She is imaginative and eager. Her religion is not cut out for her, she must manufacture something for herself, she is not so hedged about with restrictions and threats.

Both Hindu and Moslem women show great capacity for devotion to a spiritual leader. Jesus has set in motion forces which will drive out the jinn and the fears, open up doors to the testimony of his big, beau-

tiful world, and free spirits that they may meet him. Sooner or later they will recognize his claims, fall in love with his lovableness, and we shall behold such outpourings of the vials of devotion as will stir to enthusiasm and emulation the women of all the world.

VI

THE WOMAN OF THE STREET

My *dhobini* and the sweeper's wife belong to that class. Both are attractive women, with a straight, graceful carriage that puts to shame the shambling, slouching woman of the zenana. These are the women one sees on the street and in the bazaar, so low in the social scale as to need no protection.

As a class they are bright and cheerful, despite their abysmal ignorance. Their philosophy of life has been wrought out of circumstances absolutely unalterable, and they make the best of each day as it comes. They love color, the dance, the excitements of the bazaar. Their jewelry is heavy and showy, and they wear quantities of it. On *puja* days they look like animated Christmas trees.

Follow these women to their homes, and you find that they live in the worst, most undesirable quarters of the town, often in unspeakable squalor. Their houses are mere huts, put together with such nondescript material as they can find. They are very poor, as a rule. Often their food is not fresh, being filched from garbage-heaps. They are condemned by society to do the town's dirty work for a mere pittance. There is much

drunkenness and debauchery among them when they revel. When they quarrel, which is constantly, they make the air hideous with their raucous anger.

Everywhere are the signs of their utter ignorance. The doors of the schools are barred against them. Some one has truly said that India can produce no William Carey because a tanner's son may not read. Only the missions open schools for them, and in such schools no high-caste child is ever enrolled.

Among these folk breed epidemics. It is hard to enforce sanitation or preventive measure among them. The women are most obdurately against such measures.

The manners of these women correspond to their environment. Sometimes one finds some among them who are naturally refined, like my washerwoman, but on the whole they are coarse and boisterous. They are often uncannily clever, especially when they set out to get the best of a bargain. They are not without their attraction, however, and one rebels at the social order that debars them from life's more refining influences.

These low-caste folk are not Assamese. They are immigrants from central and south India. To understand the religion and customs of these people one must go to the sections from which they come. There are low castes among the Assamese, but these come under another category than the people of whom I am speaking. One cannot speak their language, and they are in-

articulate when it comes to telling about themselves. Only those who have worked among them in a large way understand and are able to interpret their background, heritage, and manner of life.

There are fifty millions among the Indian masses known as outcastes. The laws of Manu are explicit on the place of the pariah in society.

> The abode of a Chandala and Swapaca must be outside the town; they must not have the use of entire vessels; their sole wealth must be dogs and asses. Their clothes must be the mantles of the deceased; their dishes for food, broken pots; their ornaments, rusty iron; continually they must roam from place to place. Let no man, who regards his duty, religious and civil, hold any intercourse with them; let their transactions be confined to themselves, and their marriages only between equals. Let food be given them in potsherds, but not by the hand of the giver; and let them not walk by night in the cities and towns. Manu's Code is fortunately out of date in modern India, but the spirit that could treat even the lowest of human beings as Manu commanded them to be treated is still a curse in India.[1]

As to the low-caste and the outcaste's religion, let Mr. G. E. Phillips of the London Mission Society speak. He has spent many years among them:

> And what of the pariah's religion? Has he any consoling or strengthening faith to carry him through all these distresses and to mold his character so that ultimately he may overcome all the obstacles in his path? Alas! that is the most hopeless feature of his life. Ask for his god, and if he is in a merry mood, he smacks

[1] Phillips, *The Outcaste's Hope*, pp. 2, 3.

his stomach saying that is what he worships. If he is more serious, he shows you a poor hut or a platform under a *neem* tree, containing three bricks raised on end and smeared with saffron, perhaps with a little coconut lamp burning in front of them. These bricks are his god. Sometimes the idol which the pariah worships is found on inquiry to represent one of his forefathers—it may be only one or two generations back. More commonly the images or the bricks are intended to represent some female "godlings"—sometimes called "virgins" and sometimes "mothers," which have no individuality, and hence no character. Each village is supposed to possess its own "mother," though those of different villages seem to be exactly alike. Each "mother" is supposed to protect the inhabitants and live stock from disease, disaster, and famine, to promote the fecundity of cattle and goats and to give children. What part these "mothers" really play in the pariah's ideas it is difficult to say. Conversation reveals that in spite of appearances he really cherishes a half-latent belief in a supreme divine Creator who is far, far above the village "mother" and greater than any image that can be made.

Yet the undoubted fact is that neither the bricks nor the supreme Being are half so important in his notion of things as a great multitude of intermediate beings, demons or demonesses, ghosts, ghouls or goblins of all degrees of fierceness of disposition. It is these capricious, spiteful beings, always liable to be irritated, always seeking revenge for wrongs, however unintentionally committed, who really count in the life of the pariah. One month half the people in his village are lying fever-stricken; the godless sanitary inspector points out the "causes" in the filthy state of the hedges around the houses, and of the village well. But the pariah knows better. There is a "presence" in the *neem* tree at the end of the street; possessed women have said strange things; tomtoms must be beaten, coconuts and plantains must be offered, a fowl must be sacrificed or, better still, a sheep's head struck off at one blow under the tree, and then will the fever cease. When cholera is paying the village a ghastly visit, the outcastes—and not only

they—go round and round the village boundaries in a vociferous procession to propitiate the cholera goddess. So it is with small-pox—which is another demoness—with plague and every other scourge of Indian village life. In many places the pariahs celebrate an annual festival in which not only sacrifices are offered, but the blood of the sacrifices is drunk, and other revolting ceremonies are performed.

The pariah lives in dread of the supernatural. He is afraid even to yawn for fear some hateful being should gain entrance to his body. He dare not pass one street corner at noonday, and another at night, for the unseen terrors that lurk there. There is no safety for him anywhere, for even if out of his hard-earned wage he has spent money on a sacrifice to the demon or deity of one local shrine, he may by that very pious act have slighted and offended some other supernatural being near-by and there is no knowing what the consequences will be. . .

There has recently been controversy as to whether the religion of the depressed classes should be classified as "animism" or demon worship rather than as "Hinduism." Here is an incident, typical of what frequently takes place in Indian villages. . . "A woman fell ill and the relatives decided she was possessed. They took the poor creature out and set her in a sitting posture when she was extremely weak, and then they mercilessly beat her to drive the demon out of her. Thus they left her, hoping the goblin Kanni would torment her no more. And it was so. For she had passed away out of the hands of ignorant and heathenish men into the hands of the everlasting god. When they returned they found her sitting as they had left her, a corpse." It seems indeed as if the outcaste's religion is quite as effective in his degradation as the social system which has made him what he is.

The woman of the pariah of the lower castes is most of all to be pitied. Untaught her community is, and she is the most ignorant of them all. She is often

INDIAN GYPSIES
Often Seen on Nowgong Streets

shamefully abused by her menfolk; she seldom has enough to eat; she has no religion save that of fear and extreme superstition; she has no opportunities to better herself, nor indeed has she any such desire. She is married very young, and knows sorrow before the days of her childhood are over. She works very hard, for not only is hers the care of the home and children, but she must earn her bit by whatever suitable labor she finds. Life makes her rough and uncouth and happy-go-lucky.

We have done nothing for any of the lower caste women except incidentally. It is the same pitiful reason —there aren't enough of us, and we do not have the necessary funds. Yet here are fellow women, with hearts, minds, and sorrows akin to our own, with souls that yearn for God, who have no means of comfort and no way to find him. That they respond, I am sure. Our sweeper woman in Golaghat spent many a long hour talking with the matron about Christianity, and she came to prayers in the bungalow. The matron told me she was a believer in Jesus, and would come out as soon as she found an opportunity. I went home on furlough, and have lost track of her.

Can you not include on your prayer list the woman on the street in India?

VII

TAKEN IN

There certainly is a barrier between the women of the East and the women of the West. In India it may be that the Western woman finds herself shut out of the life of the women of the land because she belongs to the ruling race. Perhaps her little Oriental sister is afraid of her because of the natural snobbishness of the white race in general. Perhaps the strangeness of our clothes and manners and the bigness of our houses come in between us. Even the modest homes of missionaries seem palatial in their eyes, and the inmates are judged wealthy. They cannot, of course, conceive of any sacrifice being involved in living in their country. In the case of the missionary, also, there is the lurking suspicion that she is not quite sincere in her advances, that she goes out of her way only to win converts.

They had always been friendly enough to me, but I wanted so much to get past their reserve. I wanted to win their friendship for my own sake to prove, if possible, how much we have in common as women. I wanted to know their thoughts and their sorrows. Then, one day, I was admitted into an inner sanctum, and I was well repaid for the years away from home,

the toil in the heat, the longings to be understood, and the patient waiting for the sign to enter.

It was at a Moslem wedding. That afternoon my associate and I, accompanied by two teachers, "Sunbeam" and "Flower," went to the usual tea and reception in the zenana. The bride was a former student of ours, as indeed were most of the younger guests. We were welcomed with something akin to homage, sprinkled with perfume from silver atomizers, garlanded, led to special seats, and fanned by servants standing back of us. We sat on chairs, but the teachers slipped off their sandals and seated themselves among the other women guests on the gay rug under the canopy that roofed over the courtyard. Later in an inner room they served us tea. Again we were by ourselves seated on stiff, ungraceful European chairs, with the attending women speaking in whispers all about us. We conversed with two or three lovely girls there who had been our students, but they answered us stiffly and with constraint. We were their superiors, and they were not free with us. Our food was served on ugly English china instead of their own charming brassware.

After we had finished our tea we went back to our chairs, while "Sunbeam" and "Flower" had their tea. My companion had to leave early. From behind the flowered curtains I could hear the teachers and

hostesses laughing. I sat alone on the edge of things till I could stand it no longer, and so I slipped off my slippers and slid down on to the rug beside the woman nearest me.

There was a perceptible change. The ice of formality was broken. They had been friendly before, but the old reserve was there. Now they were cordial, as I sat with them, cross-legged, on the mat. Almost effusive they became. I had never before seen them thus. The exquisitely clad women among whom I always feel so shabby, crowded close around me. They fingered my frock. It was mauve crêpe-de-chine, embroidered with silver beads. They admired it. They wondered why I wore so few jewels. I had only my wrist watch and one ring which was, fortunately, an Indian gold one. All around me glittered jewels that would be valued at thousands of rupees. They asked me if I had no ornaments. I told them I had a few, but none as lovely as theirs. This is true. I took off my ugly, close-fitting hat and it was put on the chair outside the intimate circle where it belonged. They asked me how I do my hair. (I know they do not approve my style of hair-dressing. Frank schoolgirls have told me so. There is too much fuzz around my face for one thing. If I would wear it sleek like their own it would be much more becoming, they think. They make it sleek by applying quantities of coconut

oil. I should part it on the side, being unmarried, and pull it straight back into a coil in the back. Coconut oil would remove that red tinge. They do not appreciate auburn hair. The nearest approach to it in India is the rusty, sunburnt hair of coolie women. They think my hair is rusty because I was allowed to run about in the sun too much as a child.) They wondered why I do not wear earrings. I told them my ears had never been pierced. Some more neglect on the part of my family. They laughed at me when I said I knew it would hurt very much to have them pierced. One old woman offered to do it for me. She said that women must be prepared to pay a price for beauty as well as for anything else. The same old lady declared that what I needed was a *hawki* (chum). Every one has a chum. She would be mine. She'd pierce my ears for me. She could do it without hurting me much. She'd pick out the right kind of earrings, too—long dangly ones tipped with red stones.

Then the women of the house saw me and were horrified about my lowly seat. I must sit next the bride. Why hadn't some one seen to it before? I protested that my foreign frock would not look well beside the lovely saree the bride was wearing. "That's true," said my chum, "they who sit next the bride must have clothes almost as beautiful as the bride herself." (They do not admire our clothes.) The hostess spoke

up quickly: "She did not know she was going to sit by the bride. But being a friend of ours it is all right. Her frock is pretty, I think. Besides one cannot compare frocks and sarees." (Which is true.)

She made room for me next the bejeweled, bedecked, and richly dressed bride, sitting among silken cushions before the inevitable mirror. They discovered that the rich purple of her satin saree blended with the pale lavender of my dress, and that the gold embroidery on her draperies corresponded with the silver trimming on mine. Since I was not a bride it was quite right that the trimming should be of silver. Thus they tried to put me at my ease. They slipped off one of the wide gold bracelets the bride was wearing and clasped it around my wrist. (Sacrilege! Whoever heard of a stranger sharing the jewels of a bride? Family heirlooms at that!) I protested, but they insisted that I wear it. Then some one slipped a lovely necklace about my neck, a slender chain from which hung garlands of golden flowers with ruby centers.

They brought me a little Indian harmonium, the kind one holds in the lap, working the bellows attached to the back with the left hand while playing with the right. I wondered at it, for in most Moslem homes music is taboo. Islam doesn't approve of it. Then I saw a gramophone on a table on the other side, a sign that these people are not so strictly orthodox in this respect.

I played a few little tunes for them, the mayor's wife pumping the bellows so I might use both hands according to foreign custom. They asked me to sing, and I had to confess with shame that I did not know the words of a single Assamese song well enough to sing without looking in the book. Some of our little schoolgirls were present, and they sang instead.

We began chatting. I asked them questions I had never dared ask before, and I am sure they answered me truly, for there was a difference in their manner that told me so. I was finding their hearts. I might have done so sooner if I had not been so diffident.

Flower and Sunbeam emerged from behind the chintz curtain. They were surprised to find me on the rug, and pleased. We had to leave then, but they made us promise to come back for the final ceremony to take place at midnight.

On the way home I begged Flower to lend me a saree. She sent over two, one of white china silk with a velvet border, black, embroidered with beads, and the other yellow, shading from pale tones in the center to deep orange at the ends. It was bordered in gold. I chose the yellow one. Blossom, another teacher, draped it for me. I felt so dressed up. They brought me bracelets to wear and almost broke the bones in my hands to get them on. I wore a heavy, old-fashioned chain that had once belonged to my mother, and which

she herself had worn on her wedding-day. This greatly interested the women, and it was passed all around the room for inspection.

I had a wonderful time that night. I slipped in so quietly that it was some time before they discovered me. It created a sensation. Never before, they said, in the history of the town, had a European woman come to a wedding in a saree. They told me how nice I looked. I was inclined to believe them, for I felt nice. As to grace and richness there is no dress that can compare with the Indian woman's. I went from group to group, conducted and introduced by my chum. I met the Moslem aristocracy that night, not only of the town but of the district.

At eleven they passed strong tea to me as well as to the rest. My chum promised to keep me awake if I would do her the same favor. The air was heavy with mingled perfume. There was no means of ventilation that I could see. The guests sat so close together that it became very warm. They chatted in little groups. There were sallies of laughter, and sometimes some one would break into a song. Every few minutes some one would inquire what time it was. As it drew near midnight we all became subdued. The magic hour was approaching. The little bride grew nervous and twisted her fingers. They gave her something to drink. The women of the family came and sat beside her.

THREE SISTERS

Seated: Mrs. L. Bose, Teacher and Now Married.
Standing: (Left) Daisy Andrew, Teacher, Trained at Isabella Thoburn College; and Noni Andrew, Now a Freshman in High School

At the sound of the town gong the lawyers entered. There were two of them, old gentlemen with long snowy beards and kindly faces. Two witnesses and the bride's father were with them. The bride began to weep hysterically. They did their utmost to soothe her, her mother embracing her. The girl hid her face and wept. Moments passed. The lawyers waited patiently. They are used to the hysterics of women. Besides it was natural that the bride should weep at the thought of leaving home and friends; it would not be proper for her not to show some emotion.

Presently she grew quieter. One of the old gentlemen knelt beside her and spoke gently, "Daughter, will you accept me as your lawyer and in case of divorce or desertion a settlement of eight hundred and one rupees," (There is a superstition about figures ending in naught, hence the extra rupee.) The girl was expected to answer in the affirmative. I sat with my face covered like the rest, and we crowded together as we listened for the answer. But there was none. The old lawyer continued to speak soothingly: "Daughter, there is no cause to weep or be afraid. Since the beginning of time Allah has ordained and blessed marriage. You are about to enter upon the holy estate and privilege of womanhood. It will bring you blessing. Allah is pleased with you and will be your helper, for in this you are performing his will."

He paused for a moment before putting the question again. The girl was quiet, though her face was still hidden in her mother's draperies. She answered as she was expected to, though we could not catch her reply. Three times the question was put, and three times she replied. This is all there is to the ceremony as far as the bride is concerned. (The money provision is a sort of insurance which is banked for her against a time of need. She is at liberty to use it at any time she chooses. It is hers for keeps.)

The lawyers left the room to perform the ceremonies that have to do with the groom. As soon as they left the wailing broke out afresh in the zenana. To me, too, the grief of the bride seemed very real, though my thoughts were mostly concerned with pity for the little girl who was so soon to undertake duties so arduous and so far-reaching in their results, with so little preparation and amid people who were strangers to her. Presently her father returned, and her mother took her to the room where the bridegroom was seated. I should like to have gone with them, to have been an eye-witness to the rest of the wedding. But none of the others went, so I asked questions of my chum. Later I was able to verify what she told me.

After leaving the bride the lawyers put the question to the groom as to whether he is willing to give the amount stipulated in the agreement. If so, he answers

in the affirmative. This is repeated three times. Then the parents of the bride and the bride herself are brought in, the bride's right hand is placed in that of the groom's and he promises in front of the assembled company to take the woman, to be responsible for her care, and to take the blame if any untoward circumstance makes for her unhappiness or misfortune. That is all. The son-in-law does obeisance to his new relatives, who acknowledge the new relationship. The bride leaves the room. Betel-nut is passed around among the guests. The maulavis give advice to the groom. Sometimes there is a feast.

Suddenly the sister of the bride whispered to me to come with her. She led me to an inner room where the bride lay prostrate on the bed. She had collapsed under the emotional strain of the day. "Gentle," our school nurse, was on hand with restoratives. The women wanted to crowd into the little room but Gentle kept them out. Finally the bride was able to sit up and the ceremonial of dressing her for her journey to her new home began. This ceremony is usually private, but they gave me place. Indeed, I think they forgot me. And oh, the things I heard and saw! Intimate bits of gossip, petty wrangling, subtle jokes that I did not understand, quotations from the Koran, feminine fancies galore. The clothes worn by the bride on her wedding-day belong to the family and must be left for

the next bride. She was disrobed and dressed in the garments provided by the groom. These were of the heavy, cream-colored, gold-embroidered silk of the country. Her new jewels were the massive Assamese ones set with many small stones. We were all besprinkled and besmeared with perfume while the process was going on. There was some dispute as to the arrangement of her hair. Her mother wanted it to hang loose so she might have a bit of nap in the car that was to take her the eighteen miles to her new home. She did not see that it mattered whether her hair was combed or not so long as there was no one to see her. Popular opinion won, however, as there was fear that some calamity might overtake her if custom were not followed, and her beautiful dark tresses were drawn back into a fantastic coil, held in place by many jeweled pins.

At last the bride was ready, and word was sent to the outer room. Her men relatives came in one by one to bid her farewell. (I wanted to step into the next room. I felt I had no right to witness the intimate scene to take place. But I could not move for the crowd.) From the eldest to the youngest they embraced her and wept over her. Are Moslems necessarily Tartars, think you? I wept with the rest to hear the tender words spoken by her old daddy. He told her always to remember the teaching she had re-

ceived, to fulfil faithfully her duties as wife and mother, and so bring blessings upon her family and race.

After the farewells were over we went with the bride to the waiting Ford car. I asked if I might give her my blessing. The old grandfather heard me and said: "Oh do, Missahib. Invoke God in your fashion on her behalf that she may have courage for the days to come. After all she is but a child." These were not mere words of courtesy. He meant them. His voice was thick with tears. He followed me, heard me give my blessing and farewells, and was satisfied.

It was two o'clock when we reached the Mission Compound. I lay awake for a long time trying to take in the full significance of what I had seen, heard, and experienced. India will never be the same to me again. I have a new view-point for even the surface things of life about me.

There is a marked difference in the manner of the Moslem women of the town. They will always remember that I came as a wedding guest in a golden saree. There are times when the East and the West do meet, and we find that the hearts of both beat to the same rhythm.

VIII

OVER THE TEACUPS

Jasmine, Gentle, Sunbeam, and I were invited to take tea with Nissa, the bride of a month. Nissa is a Moslem woman, a former student of ours. Her two sisters-in-law, with whom she lives, are also women who were enrolled with us as girls.

They welcomed us with hilarity. We used the front entrance, for our hostesses were standing there calling to us. We knew there were no menfolk about by that very sign. We sat for a while in the tiny Europeanized parlor in which the menfolk receive their guests. The cane settee on which we sat was positively rickety. The European chairs and tables emphasize the tininess of the place. It is flamboyantly decorated with flaring cretonnes, a confusion of bric-a-brac, and pictures stuck at random among illuminated Moslem texts in Arabic. A very shrill gramophone was drowning out our conversation; it was a vocal solo in the strident tones of a nautch-girl, and the language was Bengali. (We have played our Victrola for Moslem women calling on us, and from that they think it is part of European etiquette to play the gramophone. It is sometimes only too easy to start a custom in the East.)

Then suddenly men's voices were heard in the yard, and our hostesses fled to an inner door, beckoning us to follow. We slid quickly behind the pink and black curtains and were in Nissa's private apartment. The older sister-in-law cautiously closed the door between us and the parlor. This was done to give us greater freedom, and so that we would not disturb the men.

We were all anxious to see the bride's things, and Nissa was not loath to show them. She kept all of them in her bedroom. She had brought as a part of her dowry a great, carved teak-wood bed, built somewhat like a four-poster, and without springs, the bottom being of boards. The bed was nicely spread with a pale green coverlet and bolsters encased in ruffled slips which Nissa had learned to make at the Mission School. A mosquito-curtain was tucked back over the framework supporting it. There was also a wonderful dressing-table and such an array of cosmetics as drew a gasp from our simple girls. There was a box of face-powder—not a bad brand either—and beside it a woolly puff. Face-powder can be bought nowadays in the bazaar, so common has its use become. There was a jar of cold-cream, a tiny pot of carmine for the lips, and one of henna paste for the nails, a bottle of hair oil, strongly scented, two orange-wood sticks, three bottles of perfume, a box of "palmolive" talcum, a

box of pink soap. In a basket were folded handkerchiefs, another article of dress borrowed from Europeans. A flowered glass tray held hairpins. Nissa and her sisters-in-law were very pleased with this array, and my teachers much too much impressed, I thought. We try to discourage the use of such things among us. Over the mirror that hung over the dressing-table, a crocheted tidy was hung. I had seen her on her wedding-day sitting among cushions before that very looking-glass.

Just outside the door on a table stood a bowl and pitcher. Near-by on pegs hung three prophylactic toothbrushes, and in three tumblers stood tubes of Colgate's dental cream. This shows how the luxuries of the West are gradually creeping into the boudoirs of the East. The Indian bathroom is a little closet with a cement or earthen floor, with a big pot of water and a tin can which is used for pouring the water over their bodies which have first been anointed with mustard oil or tumeric and then smeared with soap. They never remove all their clothing while bathing: a thin cloth covers the body even when the water is being poured. Many do not use soap. The teeth are cleaned with the chewed end of a fibrous twig, and the tooth-powder is charcoal. The hair is washed in cold water. I never could understand how they get it clean considering the amount of coconut oil they use. Evidently it does not

THREE ASSAMESE HINDU GIRLS OF HIGH CASTE
Who Studied in the Normal Department of Our School
They Are Sisters

need to be soft and fluffy as our standards require. The nails of both hands and feet are tinted with henna, and on special occasions the soles of the feet also. Carmine is used by Hindu women to make the marriage sign in the parting of the hair, and the spot between the eyes which is purely ornamental. Moslem women do not thus mark themselves.

In front of the bed on the cement floor in Nissa's room lies a strip of rag carpet woven in gay stripes. These are much used at present. Near the bed are two rather fanciful cane-chairs. By the wall, in a cupboard with glass doors, Nissa keeps her treasures—fancy cups and saucers with English mottoes on them, brightly colored fans, an American doll, her school readers, vases, brass bowls, empty bottles of fancy shapes, some pink-and-blue tumblers, and photographs. Near-by on a table is her hand sewing-machine. Back of the bed on a rack hang her sarees, nicely folded. The rest of her clothing she keeps in a green tin trunk. I felt she had a right to be proud of her bedroom. There were many signs of her contacts with us.

As we were about to leave the room, the younger of the sisters playfully smeared perfume on our foreheads and shoulders. We went across the center room to the room occupied by the sisters-in-law and found here the ordinary Indian bedroom, in the usual state of clutter.

When we returned to the middle room we found that the table had been spread with a bright pink cloth. (The Assamese are inordinately fond of pink.) The sisters excused themselves and Nissa had the servant pull up heavy European chairs for us to sit on about the table. Then the tea-things came in, cups and saucers from Nissa's cupboard, nickel-plated spoons, and a large China teapot. The tea had milk and sugar put in it in the kitchen, and it was heavily spiced with nutmeg and cinnamon. It was piping hot, which is unusual. After washing our hands in the Assamese fashion, they brought us brass trays piled high with Indian food. There were large slices of potato fried in mustard oil, thick pancakes with mutton filling, and thin ones that served as bread. Another rolled pancake like pastry had a sweet filling. I did not recognize the ingredients and when told was none the wiser. One kind of cake was filled with coconut. There was parched pulse flavored with sweet curry powder and soda-crackers out of a foreign tin. Then they brought sweets—some made of curds, some of *soojee* (cream of wheat), some of coconut, and Cadbury's chocolates to top off with. It was a most astonishing array for a tea-party, a really high tea. I like Indian food and have learned to eat with my fingers, but my worry was what to eat first. I kept my eyes on Jasmine and ate the various foods in the same order that she did.

And how these girls chatted. Much of it was girlish chatter that meant nothing—rather gossipy most of it. But there was also a serious tone sometimes and signs of the leaven of new ideas. For instance:

NISSA: "Where is Probhat Baideo?" (Baideo is an affectionate term meaning "big sister." They use it in addressing their teachers.)

JASMINE: "Why, hadn't you heard? She is married."

NISSA: "I did hear a rumor, and then some one said it was not true. We never get out, so we do not hear of things. When was she married?"

SUNBEAM: "About two months ago, wasn't it? She's living in Calcutta now."

NISSA: "Did she marry a Bengali, then?"

GENTLE: "Yes. He's very nice. He's a B. A."

NISSA: "What does he look like? Fat, with a big stomach like all Bengali babus, I warrant." She made a dramatic gesture that sent them off into peals of laughter.

The older sister-in-law hushed them by pointing toward the door to the parlor.

SUNBEAM: "Yes, he looks like that. He is very tall and quite black."

NISSA: "That's enough. I have a picture in my mind. Ugh!"

ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW: "What is his work? Is he in Government employ?"

GENTLE: "He's in charge of the ships at the harbor, but I don't know what he really does."

MISSAHIB: "He has charge of collecting customs. Every passenger's things are examined, and he figures out what the duty is if they have anything dutiable."

NISSA: "What does duty mean?"

MISSAHIB: "It is a tax Government puts on certain things that are produced in the country so that they will not be brought in so

much from the outside." It was hard to explain to her. But her mind was soon on something else.

NISSA: "I suppose he gets heaps of money for work like that."

MISSAHIB: "Yes, I have an idea he is well paid."

JASMINE: "Miss Vickland has been to Probhat's house."

NISSA: "Oh, have you? What is it like?"

MISSAHIB: "It's quite a big house for Calcutta. It has a veranda in front and big white pillars. There is a high wall around the house, and the yard is very tiny."

NISSA: "Then they have no garden?"

SISTER-IN-LAW: "Why should they want a garden? Cousin Jahanara told us they have such a big market there that no one thinks of a garden."

OTHER SISTER-IN-LAW: "Even if they had a garden everything would be stolen. I heard that Calcutta is the most wicked city in the world."

JASMINE: "Oh, I think all cities are wicked. And there are good people there, too, just as there are in Nowgong." (Jasmine has been away at college.)

GENTLE: "Yes, and in Nowgong people steal from other folks' gardens, don't they?" (Gentle had her nurse's training in Calcutta.)

NISSA, impatiently: "Is the mother-in-law nice?"

SUNBEAM: "They say she is well educated, speaks English. So do Probhat's sisters-in-law."

NISSA: "That doesn't say they're nice. Sometimes the more clever they are, the more ways they know to be cruel."

MISSAHIB: "I am sure that Probhat's new relatives are not cruel. They seem very kind and fond of Probhat. They like music, and Probhat says that often they all play and sing together. I was there for most of a day. They gave me very nice tiffin."

NISSA: "Really? She is fortunate, then. Was her wedding very nice?"

GENTLE: "Yes, indeed. It was held in the church, but there was a reception in the Mission bungalow first."

NISSA: "Why didn't I know about it? I should like to have been there. I never saw a Christian wedding."

JASMINE: "Gentle was one of the bridesmaids." (She used the term *hawki* which means "chum." All Indian brides have at least one.)

SISTER-IN-LAW: "Was there more than one *hawki?*"

JASMINE: "Yes, there were two. Flower was the other one."

OTHER SISTER-IN-LAW: "Missahib, your tea is cold, and you are not eating. Probably our food is so poor you cannot eat it. I am sorry. We did the best we knew how."

MISSAHIB: "O, indeed, your food is very good. See how much I have eaten. I will have some more tea, please, and another *nimke.*" The little lady is mollified.

NISSA: "I wish we might get to see something different. I never saw anything in all my life that was really thrilling. This purdah business makes me crazy. My anger rises every time I think of all the things we are missing."

OLDER SISTER-IN-LAW: "Hush. How silly you are. How dare you talk like that. You had the opportunity to go to school, and there are not many Moslem girls who have such a privilege as that."

NISSA: "I do appreciate the Mission school. Without it I should know nothing, nothing. I am rebelling against our custom. We are silly to stand for being penned up like a lot of cows. No, not cows, for cows are driven to pasture. There is not an animal kept within the walls as we are."

SISTER-IN-LAW: "Nissa, do be careful." She looked toward the door of the adjoining room. The gramophone had ceased grinding out its racket. For a moment the three of them looked frightened. Then the servants said that the men had gone out. They drew a sigh of relief.

NISSA: "Well, Christian women are allowed freedom and they are none the worse for it. They are not half as stupid as we Moslems."

No one said anything for a minute. Nissa continued: "I would

like to go to Calcutta. I'd like to see the beautiful places, the pictures that move, and the wicked places, too." One sister-in-law, the older, was shocked, the other smiled. Nissa went on: "But there is no use to hope. If we did go to Calcutta, they'd curtain the windows of the train, and then when we got there they'd shut us up behind walls."

GENTLE: "There are lots of carriages nowadays in which purdah women ride."

NISSA, bitterly: "Yes, but I warrant you they are shuttered." Turning to me, she said: "Is Probhat very happy?"

MISSAHIB: "Yes, I am sure she is. Though she has to conform to some rules she isn't used to. Her mother-in-law is very particular about the etiquette of the girls. They do not go out very often, and never alone as Probhat used to while she was here. Her husband takes her places in the evening though."

NISSA: "It is not only Moslem but Indian customs that are wrong. What sort of things does she have to do that she does not like?"

JASMINE: "She has to wear the red *tilak* mark between her eyes and the Hindu marriage sign. And she has to do obeisance to her husband when he leaves and when he returns."

GENTLE: "Why, I thought they were Christians?"

MISSAHIB: "So they are. The marriage sign and the matter of obeisance is not a matter of religion, but a custom of refined Indian ladies of all communities."

JASMINE: "Do you think it necessary for an educated girl to observe these things?"

MISSAHIB: "It depends on the circumstances. I don't think it pays to be rebellious about them as long as they involve no principle. Her mother-in-law is a woman of the old school, who is proud of her breeding, and so insists on the things considered nice in women."

JASMINE: "In college we discussed such things, and we decided it was up to us younger women to put aside those customs that used to stand for a different order than they do now."

MISSAHIB: "I think I know how you girls feel. But you gain nothing by rubbing people the wrong way. If Probhat distresses her mother-in-law there will be friction and she would never be forgiven the discourtesy. Reverence for old age is fundamental in your code, as I understand it. The changes must come gradually. You must not make the mistake, either, of thinking everything Indian wrong. So much depends on circumstances. Bengalis are much more strict than the Assamese. Conventions mean more to them. I don't think Probhat minds so much now. She has very good sense, you know, and adapts herself well, as an educated girl should. They think a great deal of her."

There was a pause. The sisters-in-law had gone to the kitchen with the tea things.

Then Nissa said, guardedly: "I, too, am supposed to worship my husband. But I don't when I can help it. He is quite nice. Sometimes he kisses me good-bye, and never scolds me if I don't bow to him."

MISSAHIB: "I see that you are one of Assam's new women."

NISSA: "Perhaps. There are many who feel as I do. They don't dare express it. I don't always. You yourselves have taught us that men and women are equal in the sight of God and have proved it in your own lives."

GENTLE: "So much depends on the men. I think men are better educated on these things than they used to be. I am glad the doctor doesn't scold you or punish you for your new ideas."

NISSA: "O, dear me, no. He only laughs at his modern wife. My sisters think me only a child. I think they agree with me in their hearts, but they must play the part mother-in-law would have had had she lived."

The sisters entered with fresh tea, and though we could eat no more, we were made to swallow it. Then the spices went around, and it was time for us to go. With a great deal of pleasantry they bade us farewell

and stood watching our departure from the doorway in the zenana wall.

The conversation had been typical of the things that interest the modern girl. They talk of school friends, marriages, unhappy homes where there are cowives or concubines, of physical weaknesses of women, of the disadvantages of the purdah and kindred topics. The school girls introduce the ideas of a different order. I have seen so often the heart of the younger woman in Assam, here as elsewhere, torn with desires for something bigger. Those schooled under the old order do not understand. They see nothing but gentility in their imprisonment and in the close observance of custom made honorable by long usage. Christian ideas —though seldom so labeled—are taking hold. There is insurrection in many a curtained domain, and it is the desire for freedom that sets in motion the forces that will bring it.

IX

GETTING THE WOMEN TOGETHER

The fact that more and more we are getting the women of the country together is one of the surest signs of progress. Custom is against the meeting together of women of many classes and creeds, and zenana doors have to open outward to make it possible. Between Hindu, Moslem, and Christian women there are deep antipathies, each class regarding the other askance. And yet nowadays they do meet. Not so often or so generally as we should like but in numbers vastly worth-while. But there are difficulties.

In the first place, it is almost impossible to get them to come on time. Set the hour at two, and the audience is not assembled much before four. There are clocks in the better-class homes, but often the women do not know how to tell time. The gong at the town treasury sounds out the hour, but the women pay no heed to it, or, if they do, they do not begin preparations to come before the gong sounds two.

Then there is the matter of social rank, which means a scuffle for seats, the highest in rank wishing the front and best ones. The real aristocrats usually come late, and the women whom they consider vulgar and com-

mon have already filled up the front rows. We have solved the problem by using both chairs and benches. The chairs are put in the back. Being considered more honorable than benches, the aristocrats are content with them even though not so near the front, and that leaves the benches for the others who want to see. In the homes they do not sit on chairs, but they have an idea that the offering of chairs is the European way of showing respect.

There is incessant talking. Much of it is irrelevant to the program. Often there is laughter, usually at something some one says. It is always the trivial details they notice. Those who consider themselves more progressive are shocked and add to the confusion by shouting to the others to be still.

Then there are the crowds of babies and children ever present. Indian women are never free from their clinging hands and clamoring voices. They are incredulous when they hear of European husbands staying at home with the children so the wife may go out and enjoy herself. As a rule a Moslem or Hindu gentleman thinks it far beneath his dignity to play the rôle of baby-tender. Probably the baby would howl endlessly. They are toted from infancy, and only their mothers have the patience to do the toting.

The women come in great numbers. The seats are crowded to capacity. Ten occupy the space four

Europeans would take. The atmosphere becomes stuffier and stuffier, made worse by the mingling of exotic perfumes and the scent of hair oil. The children, unaccustomed to restraint, become fretful. Soon a chorus of wailing interrupts the program. With great confusion the mothers climb over the rest in their row and take their infants out, to add their voices to the constant buzzing on the veranda outside.

They are the most unsystematic people in the world, I do believe. In determining the prizes to be awarded at the Baby Welfare Exhibits the babies must be tested and examined. We have tried to separate them into groups according to age. It is most strenuous exercise to corral the mothers and babies into the right rooms. Then, the prizes being determined upon, it requires a megaphone to make oneself heard to announce them above the hubbub. The women whose babies win are called to the platform; they become suddenly shy and have to be escorted through the crowded aisle. Sometimes the wrong woman comes, and it takes great verbal effort and tact to explain to her that her baby did not win. There is heartburn and bitter speech on the part of those whose children do not get a prize, and much dissatisfaction if the prize goes to the child of a low-caste woman.

At the Baby Welfare Prize giving it is customary to give every child under six a little toy, and all other

children present a sweet. The money for this is provided by subscription among the townspeople. We attempt to simplify matters by seating the older children outside on the grass and distracting them with games. The order lasts but a moment. Mothers become anxious lest their children be overlooked and stand up, shouting and waving their arms frantically, or crowding into the aisle until it becomes impassable. A mob is the result, made worse by the sudden inrush of the older children who want a toy, too.

It is exceeding difficult, then, to get ideas across to women in the mass. The stereopticon-picture method is the best and one which we use often. Fewer women come at night. Those who do come often lose the meaning of the picture because they must comment aloud on the scene and tell some one else that the man in the picture looks like so-and-so, and "Ay-O, what a pretty house!" or "What a fat lady!"

This is what the zenana system does to the beautiful women it aims to protect. Their minds do not expand, they do not know how to act in public, they cannot readily grasp a new view-point. But though these ladies do not understand much of our theorizing, they do appreciate our love and efforts to entertain them. At the meetings they meet their friends, and through it all worth-while topics are added to zenana conversation for days to come. "There is no caste in love,"

says an eminent Indian woman lawyer. Even the stern old lawgivers recognized its potency, and recommended freeing of woman's mind as a step to progress, progress on roads that they even did not know how to define. They say it in a conciliatory tone, but that they say it is something, "When the women of the house are led out of bondage, the gods of progress are well pleased."

I can tell you of women who are learning to act together. They are learning to do things together here in Assam. Assam's women did their full share of knitting and sewing and making bandages for the soldiers during the War. Their menfolk fought side by side somewhere at the front, and it created a tie between them that will not soon fray out. In temperance we are enlisting the women in great numbers. They have a common foe, for though Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity all forbid the use of intoxicants, the young men of all three communities are learning to like foreign drinks, thinking to drink them is to become like sahibs. Every town has a flourishing temperance branch, and the women give cheerfully and generously to the work. Community welfare programs and health movements enlist many. Clubs for self-improvement are found everywhere. Baby welfare and education for girls are promoted by the club women and the women of the homes who realize what they themselves have missed by living too early to have the opportunities of the

school. Some are rabid for home rule, spinning daily the allotted bit of thread called for by the Swaraj movement. Such women wear only homespun.

The hope lies, however, with the girl children in our schools. Even a little education makes a difference. It has taken the Nowgong School fifty years to make education for upper-caste Hindu and upper-class Moslem girls popular, and even yet we have to cater considerably to keep them in school. We see signs of budding intellects and expanding heart courage as we organize them in behalf of temperance, religion, purity, and reform. Girl Guide Work makes a wonderful appeal to them, increasing the spirit of democracy and self-reliance. We find that even Indian girls can become enthused with school spirit, the first step toward community spirit. Education frees the human spirit from petty entanglements, and so it is that we count upon the girls who have been to school for big-hearted service in the days to come.

X

THE THOUGHTS OF HIDDEN WOMEN

For centuries the world of women in India has been largely a hidden one and has not seemed to count much in the affairs of men. But a new day has dawned, and the pale beams of its early light are penetrating into the dark recesses of the zenanas, and wakening to life the inmates, a life of thought, ambition, and achievement. Meeting in their clubs for self-improvement their thoughts take more and more tangible shape. Some of the more favored among them, who have been educated by a private tutor, or have, perhaps, known a year or two of happy school life, are the leaders. Thus there have come into my hands some essays written by these women and read in my presence at their club meetings. They have been translated into English by Anundi Kenowar, one of our first Christian Assamese girls to receive a college degree. I wish to give two or three of these essays, for they are eloquent of the ideas of the modern, high-caste or high-class women of Assam. As you read these essays remember that they were written and given by Hindu women, belonging to a race which has frowned upon the education of women for centuries.

Education of Women

The education of women is the only way to preserve the life of our race. The race that has no female education has no prosperity. The wise confess that if there is no education of women there can be no real advance. By the education of women we do not mean only that women shall know how to read books, write letters, or pass examinations. The real meaning is to teach the women to carry on well her household and religious duties as well, and to conduct herself in a faultless manner. Even today girls would learn from the example of the great and glorious Joymoti. Her reverent actions and her loyalty should be attained by the educated women of today. Such teaching has a big place in education. If a woman has not learned these, with the knowledge of every other thing she is not educated. There are many other things, besides, which a woman should know. We will take them in order.

First of all, a woman should learn obedience. If she does not learn this herself, how can she teach this great virtue to her children? The rules of religion and morality must be mastered by her to the profit of her sons and daughters.

Secondly, she should have a knowledge of household arts. If a woman cannot keep house she cannot be a real wife, and then what avails all other learning? Therefore the conduct of a home should have a place in the curriculum of girls' schools.

Thirdly, she should learn the care of children. This is necessary, for the bringing up and training of the child is in the hands of the mother. No one can mold a child's character as his mother. The hope of the community and the nation lies in the children. We get fruit according to the seed we sow. The child's chief place of learning is in the home, and his principal teacher is his mother. Because a child goes to his mother naturally, the mother has an opportunity to dispel bad thoughts from his mind and plant good ones instead. From infancy our girls should be given such training as will make them grow up as roses, fragrant and beautiful. For the girl of today will be the mother of tomorrow.

GIRL SCOUTS, NOWGONG, ASSAM

Helping her husband in the running of his material interests is indeed the woman's religion. The relationship existing between men and their wives is such that the prosperity and eternal well-being of each depends on the other. Born in parts unknown to each other, they come together in a supreme moment, enter into this sacred relationship which they must keep forever. And the *maya* of God is such that while thousands of ignorant women are living in the sad conditions of ignorance, other thousands are proving their greatness, being educated. A country cannot prosper even though there is courage and strength on the side of the husbands if on the side of the wives there is negligence and laziness. And the men of the race cannot progress as individuals if their womenfolk remain in ignorance.

A weak-minded woman who has no aim is always an obstacle in the path of her husband, son, and her community. A strong-minded, educated woman, on the other hand, is always a helpful influence. A woman cannot be called educated until she is well developed in body, mind, and soul. Husband and wife cannot be happy if they cannot think together or have common ideals. Even though they may be happy at first, their happiness will not last long. If their very souls cannot unite they will fail in everything—religion, prosperity, and their eternal salvation. There will not be perfect peace between them, and as a result they will be inattentive in their work and restless in their thoughts. An educated woman is a true helpmeet. If we could really see the harm wrought by an ignorant woman, it would appall us.

An educated woman should be not only a partner in a man's religious life, but in everything else that interests him. Her duty is not only to help her husband, but also to correct him. A man does not always do the right thing; it may be due to ignorance, or wilfulness, but his wife should see to it that he drive the chariot of his life along the right highways. When a man is single he must depend on his friends for such direction, but after marriage, it is the wife's place to help him thus.

Men ought to consider the grave mistake they make when they

marry ignorant girls. In the first place, the girl loses her health in the early marriage our customs insist upon, and, as a result, her children are always weak and sickly. In the second place, she cannot share his thoughts or see things from his point of view. This leads to a lack of sympathy and understanding.

It is a sad but common spectacle to see a very young girl performing the duties of both wife and mother. She does not know how to properly look after her child, and the difficulty of this task breaks down the mother's health. Child marriage is the wall that bars the way of women's education. Scientists tell us of the appalling numbers of child wives who die prematurely. Child marriage stands in the way of the education of girls, increases the number of widows, and checks the body and soul development of the race. The educated communities among us should see to it that their daughters, sisters, and wives have the opportunity of an education.

Character is the chief attribute of womanhood. Education makes a woman wise and her character good. A truly educated woman lives apart from envy, treachery, jealousy, pride, enmity, impiety, immorality, and becomes modest and womanly in her manner. A real man must possess courage and intelligence, a real woman must be modest. Education makes a woman serious. Chastity in woman is praised by the whole world. The unchaste woman is ugly, even though her features be beautiful, and poor, even though she possess much wealth. A very poor woman who wears the jewel of purity is truly beautiful and the mistress of boundless wealth.

A woman should know how to cook, weave, and sing. These accomplishments increase her beauty. It is a beautiful task to cook for one's family. Nowadays in many homes, owing to the laziness of the women of the house or to newly acquired luxury, cooks are employed to do this holy task. This is a very lamentable thing. Food cooked by a servant has not the same flavor as the food prepared by the hands of the mistress of the house.

Besides knowing how to perform household duties well, a wife should know how to sew and sing. It is not good to spend all

the time in sewing, however, for it hurts the eyes, and surely that is not worth the meed of praise sought for in the display of fine needlework. But the garments needed by the family should be made by the women of a house. Girls seem to prefer crocheting and embroidering on canvas. But before these merely ornamental arts be learned girls should be able to weave, to make their own and their families' garments, and how to darn and patch torn clothing. The neglect of these last two things is really dreadful in our homes. The guardians and principals of girls' schools should see to it that the girls learn not only to make new garments but also to take care of the old. In the interest of economy such knowledge is necessary. And singing makes for happiness, of the girl herself and of those who hear her.

Think what a goddess of fortune a girl thus trained would be to her household. What beauty and prestige these virtues will give to a woman! Weaving does us Indian women a great deal of good. In the first place, it gives us an occupation for our leisure hours. Secondly, it does no harm to our health as some other occupations might; and thirdly, it lessens the expenditure of money for clothes. Hand-woven clothing is not only cheaper, but it wears longer than the garments bought in the bazaars. Sewing helps in the same way. Singing of hymns attracts the mind to thoughts of religion. It also deepens the sacred love between man and wife.

A good education makes a woman's heart simple and kind. Kindness to all living creatures is a part of every woman's religion. Women are apt to be weak in their judgment of what is right and what is wrong, of what is good and what is bad. Education helps and strengthens her judgment. Religious feeling is strong in a woman naturally. Humility, reverence, simple-mindedness are a woman's constant companions. They know instinctively to whom reverence is due. Religion and its study is an important part of a woman's education. Religious study makes a girl's mind soft and receptive, thus preparing the way for education in other branches. Religion is the root of every custom in the world. The study of sacred lore naturally turns the thoughts to ideals of

devotion, loyalty to one's husband, and love for one's family, stedfastness to duty, etc. When ability is joined to religion the latter becomes more and more deep-rooted.

Let me ask again—how can a race prosper if the mothers of our future generations are not educated today? The mind of an ignorant woman is always dark, and how can a mind sitting in darkness be happy? A sad person's health is apt to be bad as well. In our land both boys and girls are born, but it is often seen among us that the birth of sons produces happiness and the birth of girls the opposite. God has sent both men and women to this world, each for his special work. Why is it that one should be so loved and pampered, and the other despised? Though of separate creation there is a unity between them. Each has a place to fill that is important for the well-being of the race.

Good health, a happy heart, a well-developed mind are the chief attributes of a developed personality. How can a woman gain the necessary virtues for living well if she is not taught? Education produces housewives who are gentle in times of misfortune, well disciplined in times of suffering, loving as mothers, sisterly in conversation, pleasant, gracious, skilled in their household tasks and religious. Therefore friends, we must have education.

The writer of the above was a very strong-minded young woman who had resisted the rules of her caste—Brahmin—and refused to marry. Later her blind grandfather, her sole guardian, married her to a very inferior man, against her will. I shall never forget the change that came over her. A short time afterward I learned that she had died. They tell me that she had no known disease, but died of a broken heart. She was destined for leadership, but custom took its toll of another useful life. She had persisted in her studies under

a private tutor till she was able to pass the Middle English examinations, which mark the close of the grammar school period. She was planning on taking Teacher-Training in Nowgong when her marriage was forced upon her. Though her own usefulness was thus cut off, her influence will go on, for she had already started thought trains in many a feminine mind that will lead some time to fruition in better opportunities for women.

An Address Given at a Students' Club
(Organized by the School Girls of Golaghat)

Most honorable chairman, honorable ladies, and girls who are the future leaders of our community:

By the grace of the Almighty God you have met here today with a great object in view. The responsibility of welcoming our guests has fallen upon us ignorant girls. We appreciate your coming, honorable ladies. We are not worthy to welcome you, yet by the virtue of your simple-mindedness and sincerity you have met with us, leaving the tasks of your households. Please accept our earnest thanks. We hope you will overlook our crudities and mistakes. Accept our greetings. And before we address ourselves to the work of the afternoon, shall we not fall at the feet of the Almighty and pray that he may bless us and help us in the work for which we have assembled.

[Here a prayer song was chanted—whose words, though addressed to the Hindu Supreme deity, are worthy even the use of Christians.]

Many gentle men and old-fashioned women in our town today may get a shock when they hear that there is a students' meeting among us girls. They will ask the questions: "What is the purpose of it? Of what use is it?" They will say, no doubt, "A

woman's duty is to cook, to look after parents, husband, and other members of her family, but not to go to meetings and hear or give lectures."

We agree that the above-mentioned duties are ours, but we contend that we have a still wider sphere of life. It is a sad thing that even today so many people fail to understand the value of education, and therefore they have many wrong ideas about it and blame us students very unjustly for faults that are not ours.

The honorable Kusum Kumari Debi will speak at length on our aims, but I wish to preface her remarks with a few of my own. I do not know much about it, but I have some ideas that you may be interested in. The aims are thus stated in our books: "To teach women to do their full duty to country and community, to help the rising generation to be good housewives and good mothers for the purpose of rearing children who shall further help their motherland. Also to teach them the folly of luxurious habits, of imitating the rich. Also to do away with the customs and superstitions that hinder women, such as the 'purdah.'"

Ladies, do not be frightened. We are not advising that our girls be turned loose on the streets to walk boldly with uncovered heads, though an educated girl can walk uncovered and still be virtuous and modest, while the properly veiled and chaperoned woman who is ignorant may be a woman of bad repute. That is to say we must not make the wearing or discarding of the veil the criterion of judging a woman. The purdah must go because it is standing in the way of our women's education. The glorious women of old—Sita, Savitri, Lilavoti, Damayanti, Kunti, Gargi, and others—were not purdah women. The sun of their chastity still shines brightly. Though they were free to go about, they were so well trained and had such good sense that they brought honor to womankind, even to this day.

Another aim of this club is to do our bit in reviving the dying industries of our country, to encourage the use of our own medicines, the compounds of the wholesome herbs and juices of our sun-kissed forests and fields.

Discussion is at the root of every real development. Discussion of these things by many is better than by a few, and we shall need the strength which is ours united, and we shall need to create much public opinion if we are to do the big things which are to be done. We must have many discussion centers, we must unite many minds and hearts in the work of national advancement. Without unity no nation can prosper, without united effort we cannot win success.

It is at this time of life that girls choose the kind of lives they wish to lead in the future, and they must begin now to work for it. School days are the days in which to mold girl life and the life of the women of tomorrow.

Both men and women must be educated if our nation is to prosper. Prosperity cannot be perfect or permanent if one-half of the people hinder it through their ignorance. Women must be educated, too, for theirs it is to inspire the rising generation with the ideals which will express themselves in the future of our nation's life. If they are not trained they will defeat the work of the men, for they will leave neglected the very thing upon which the men must build, the boys and girls in the homes. When we have both wise and virtuous mothers in the homes, we shall have both wise and virtuous men to carry on our country's work, for every one knows that the virtue and wisdom of women is the virtue and wisdom of men. In Assam there is an old saying, "Buy land that is well watered, and marry a girl whose mother is good; then shalt thou prosper."

Men are always under the influence of women. Are you surprised to hear me make that statement? You may ask, "How can the man who is our lord, and without whose permission we may not even eat the rice set before us, be under our influence?"

If you consider the matter a little you will understand my meaning. There is a sense in which it is true that we are ruled by them, but in another sense they are under our power. Let me use an illustration.

Brothers and sisters in a home, being the children of the same

parents, are united by ties of deep love. Then, one day, the brother marries and brings a hitherto unknown woman into the home. Then all the love which he bestowed upon his brothers and sisters is now bestowed upon this woman, and he is ready to sacrifice his own life for her. This shows how a man is led by the hand of the woman he loves. Sometimes she leads him astray, especially if she is ignorant. Really the world belongs to women, and they are not really bound in their actions. You all know that the women in our homes will act as they wish ultimately.

One of the chief functions of student life is the formation of character. Sisters and mothers, do not mind if you are poor in this world's possessions; seek the greater wealth of a good character. If we can get homes where both the man and his wife have good characters it will go far toward improving our society. Education in our schools and colleges does not give all we want to learn. We do not limit the term education to mean only mental training. The soul and the body, too, must be trained, and developed.

We must also learn to do more beautifully our household tasks. Our work must be cooperative with that of the men outside. Men and women can thus work together, a great and sacred duty is this. On our work today depends our condition tomorrow. Babies get food when they cry. We must complain to get the help of others, and we must work to help ourselves.

I meant only to make a few introductory remarks, but I have said more than I needed to. I thank you for your patience in listening to my dry speech. In closing I pray that God may give our club a long life. I ask you to pardon my mistakes. Let us proceed, then, to the consideration of the serious work before us.

An Address Given at the Same Meeting

Honorable chairman, ladies, and beloved student sisters:

First of all, I request that you will forgive any mistakes I may make in the course of my speech. Let us fall before the feet of

God and pray for the longevity of our students' association, and let us do our part in keeping it going.

Ever the thought of the backwardness of our women fills me with sadness. Darkness has not been removed from where the women sit. We can see, however, the dim light of advancement shining far away. We have not had the chance to get near it yet.

Sisters, consider how the women of other countries are advancing. We tremble when we hear about them. In the great war the women of Europe did all the work of the men at home so their men could fight the battles that had to be fought!

In ancient times, we had such women among us. But the shame lies that today we dare not even mention their names. We should dim the light of their glory if we claim them as our Aryan ancestresses. Savitri, Sita, Damayanti, and the most unselfish Sabya, who were noted for their purity and heroic devotion, the great astronomer Khanand, the mathematician Lilaboti, were all born in this land of ours and won eternal glory; they are in heaven now. In our own Assam we have Joymoti, who gave her life to save her lord, the brave Mula Gurbari who also sacrificed herself unto death for her motherland. These are now resting in the peaceful bosom of our Father.

Our country does not lack in anything. It is only our stupidity and unwillingness to wake up from our slumber that is drawing us downward. Great men and women have opened the way for us, but we stand where we do because we are not willing to follow their example. Let us bow before the Almighty that we may have the strength to overcome all obstacles and courage to go forward. Again I say that the causes of our downfall and our misery lie in ourselves.

There is no friend in this time of our need that can be compared to education. Instead of being educated we have been taught only how to eat and sleep. We have forsaken learning, and today we are beggars at the doors of others. Today we must beg for an insignificant piece of cloth, but our grandmothers used to plant cotton with their own hands, and after spinning the thread, wove

the cloth themselves. They had to give to others after their own needs were satisfied. Does not their example inspire us?

Open the pages of history, and you will find that no nation ever remains at a standstill. The world moves with the wheel of time. Those who are regarded as civilized today may become savages tomorrow, while those whom we deem savages today may be sitting at the top level of civilization tomorrow. We must advance or we go backward. Who are we to sit with hands folded instead of climbing the ladder of advancement?

We must unite in this work. The united efforts of many single, insignificant bees produce great honeycombs; weak, single fibers of jute unite to make ropes of such strength that they can safely bind elephants with them. In all union there is strength. We girls, insignificant as we are, can unite to serve our Motherland. Of course we can. Before long, if we are in earnest, women like Sita and Savitri will lift up their heads from among us.

Mothers present, educate your daughters. Let them have time to study. Though they are weak now, in the future they will be the leaders of our society. They will better help their husbands in all their activities if they are educated so they can know what it is all about. These little girls will be housewives and mothers tomorrow. They will have to rear children of their own. Just as the value of an article depends on the skill of the artisan who produced it, so the development of a child depends on the quality and skill of its mother. The first person the baby sees is its mother, and he will imitate her characteristics and her faults. The children of an educated woman will be modest, wise, and eager to learn; the child of an ignorant woman will be bold, foolish, and stupid. Mothers are the first and best educators of men. We girls must encourage our sisters to go to school.

In a few years Assam will yield up her jewels, as fair as any with the polish and setting favorable to their beauty. Education broadens the mind, spreads national love; we girls, with our arms about each other's necks, should live together and plan together like brothers and sisters of one family. As we take our

places in the community's life, we shall still be united, and that union will give us strength to work for the further advancement of our country.

In conclusion, at the feet of the Ruler of the universe, I pray for the longevity of this association, and also that the older women may extend to us their sympathy and cooperation.

As I have nothing more to say, I will thank you for your patience in listening to my most uninteresting address, and ask your kindly permission to resume my seat.

Girls of India, Fifty Years Ago and Today

(An Address given by Mrs. H. P. Das, Assam's leading feminist at the Jubilee of the Nowgong Mission Girls' School)

Chairman, ladies, and dear students:

While in Dibrugarh I received a letter from Miss Hay asking me to speak at this time upon the improved social conditions in Assam today as compared with the condition of things social fifty years ago.

Upon receipt of the letter I gave the matter serious thought. I have little wisdom of my own, and therefore I discussed the question with friends and others as I had opportunity. Many times I asked the question, "What improvement do you see in Assam today as over conditions fifty years ago?" Very often the reply was: "I see no improvement or advancement; rather conditions are worse. The girls of today have no health, they are weak, and can do no work. Being educated, they are too fond of clothes and of showing off. Girls of fifty years ago were healthy and could work," etc.

The words above may be true in part, but that there has been no improvement, rather a going backward, cannot be true. In our social life there has been much improvement.

I have not had fifty years' experience in Assam and I am not familiar with all Assam. I can, however, speak for twenty-five years' experience, an experience gained among neighbors, friends,

relatives, and only within this circle. I wish to tell you at this time of what I have seen during these years and among my limited acquaintance.

In the old days there was no interest in the education of girls. Nowadays most girls learn to read and write, and teach our own children. In this way we receive many forms of help.

For our benefit nowadays many books are being written to tell us how innumerable educated people, through pain and trials and many inconveniences, have endured and obtained wisdom. We are greatly helped by applying to our own lives the wisdom gained through reading these books. A donkey may carry many luxuries and many precious things on his back, but he cannot enjoy them. In the same way one cannot be wise by simply reading books; one must apply their education to one's work, and only then is one truly wise. I am proud to say that the Assamese girls with whom I am acquainted are, every one, applying their education in their work, and thus increasing the glory of education.

It has been said, "One learns by writing, one by reading, and one by seeing." By travel and coming in contact with many people we gain much wisdom. In the past we did not have this privilege. But now it is convenient for us to meet women from many countries, and meeting them is a great help to us. They have left their happy homes, their relatives, and their birthplace for the sake of helping other people. Even numberless inconveniences have not decreased their enthusiasm. Now seeing their example we understand that we were not born to think of ourselves all the time. All the women in the world have much work to do, and our lives will be profitable only as we remove another's suffering or as we improve the world a little by living unselfishly.

In the past there was a great deal of talk about the "high-class" and the "low-class" people. Gradually these two expressions are disappearing from our conversation. Nowadays the honor is given to virtue: glory in mere ancestry is on the decrease. If a person has no personal virtue or ability, his being born in a good family does not bring him much honor.

In the past the evidence of good birth in a girl was a slow walk, a slow manner of speech, to know nothing of keeping accounts, but only able to throw away the leavings of a meal, etc. The more useless a girl was the greater the evidence that she belonged to a good family. But today we think the opposite; the girl who walks fast, who is active, is the one who is noticed, and the girl who is economical is the one we respect.

In the past men thought that it was disgraceful for a person of good family to use his hands for any form of work. To recline on cushions with a maid to comb her hair and to massage her legs was the sign of greatness in a woman, but today that conception is changed. Nowadays our girls think that to spend one's time uselessly is the same as wasting one's life. They count themselves fortunate if they can spend their time in good works.

That the educated girls of today spend their time in dressing themselves, with no other thought than how they look, is not true. Even though educated, it is not necessarily wrong for a girl to give time to her personal appearance. Man was created a worshiper of beauty, and must produce beauty. Beauty is a form of pleasure, rests our eyes, and adds joy to life. But to spend more than one can afford of money or time for personal adornment is wrong. It is praiseworthy if with a little thought we can make ten people happy by our personal appearance, if one can do it with little expense and comparatively little time.

Years ago women of good families were supposed to wear nothing but silk. To wear cotton was nothing less than a disgrace. I have heard that twenty-five years ago they wore blouses costing fifty to a hundred rupees. Today a girl would not dare wear a blouse costing fifty or a hundred rupees. The girls of today like simplicity in dress. I know several girls who spin their own cotton and then weave it, make a blouse of it, and wear it. When they wear the work of their own hands their satisfaction shines in their faces. In the old days women never had the same sort of joy in their expensive blouses as the girl of today has in her hand-woven cotton one. There is a girl in this audience today who makes

her own clothing from the spinning of the thread to the sewing of the garments. As she is very modest I will forbear to mention her name.

The girls of today like to wear cotton *meklahs.* I tried to persuade a girl I know to wear a silk blouse the other day, and she began to cry, saying she didn't think it nice in this day and age to wear silk for common.

The other day Miss Vickland invited me over to the Mission compound to hear the girls practise their Jubilee music. When I did not see the girls she told me they were using the *dheki,* pounding the rice they would eat the next day. I think that is splendid. Later she called them together to sing, and they sang so nicely I was amazed and thought it heavenly. Some people still think that learning makes girls proud, but seeing things like this is bound to change that opinion.

A girl from Gauhati was attending school with me in Dibrugarh. When she finished she returned to her home. Her people are farmers. She came to pay us a visit, and brought us twenty seers of Joha rice which she had hulled and cleaned herself. In her home there are servants to do that work, but out of love for us she did it herself. That rice in my eyes was as precious as diamonds. People used to think that girls who had been educated would want to fly around in airships, and be above the homely tasks of the house. But the two illustrations given, and many more, are proof that the educated girl is taught to respect highly work itself and all who work.

Among my relatives there is a B. A. She is not satisfied with cooking a meal, she sweeps the floors, washes the dishes, and keeps things neat and clean by her own efforts. After the sweeper has cleaned the upper part of the latrine she goes out once a week with a bottle of phenyle and cleans everything all over again. "You must do things with your own hands if they are to be properly done," she says. Sometimes I have seen her working among the flowers or vegetables. Else she is weaving. She does not waste a minute. She teaches also in a high school for girls.

She said to me one day, "If I can give to the girls of my country the amount of education which I have, then I shall be satisfied." All the girls are charmed with her goodness: they love her and respect her. Let me tell you of another educated girl. She worked in a girls' school in another place. Being transferred from there she came to teach in a school near her own home. One day, about the time of the Bohgar festival (March) she saw her mother buying several towels, and paying a rupee for them. She told her mother to return them and she would weave her some herself. There were only ten days before the festival, but according to her promise she finished them within the ten days. Nowadays she teaches school and directs the work of three weaving machines. The *meklah* and *chuddar* I am wearing were woven by her. She is active, happy, and is fascinated with her work.

In the school at Dibrugarh we have a loom in the hostel. When the girls hear the sound of weaving they all rush out anxious to have a hand in it. Each girl having a turn at the weaving-machine, it is kept going until dark. At evening time they have to go to study class. One girl said she hated to have night come for that meant she must stop weaving. Girls are finding it a joy to work both inside and outside the home, and therefore their influence, enthusiasm, and good work are increasing.

Some time ago at a station I saw a woman with a long veil enveloping her. She did not know what was going on around her. Just as men carry their luggage they had to direct where she should be taken. At the present time such a sight is very rare. Educated Assamese women do not wear veils. They have faith in themselves and are self-reliant and courageous. If they fall into danger they can save themselves. The girls of today are worthy to be real wives: they will bear their own burdens, lighten their husbands' burdens, and themselves be a burden to no one.

[Translated by Annie Gogoi, an Assamese girl who teaches in the Gale Memorial Bible School at Jorhat. For her mother's story see my former book, *With Christ in Assam,* under the heading "The Making of a Madonna."]

XI

ASSAM'S CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD

The best apologetic Christianity has in non-Christian lands is what it has done for woman, the type of womanhood it produces. For, as of old, Jesus walks through the land to exalt womanhood.

In India the Christian woman has the highest social status of all women. For her the school doors are open to satisfy that desire for knowledge and improvement which is the natural expression of the awakened soul. She does not marry till she is mature and, generally speaking, chooses her husband. She may walk abroad with uncovered face: no comment is made, for society understands the Christian custom, though it does not approve it for women of the other faiths. She is free to put her hand to any number of different forms of service as she is led. Of the increasing number of girls who take college degrees in India the larger percentage are Christians, and girls whose freedom is more or less due to Christian influence.

The home life of the Christian woman is happier than that of her Hindu and Moslem sisters. There is more intelligence there. Life has a purpose in which the wife has a share. She has no rivals in the affec-

S[illegible]OTI HEM PROBHA DAS
[illegible]ator Author, Feminist

FIRST CHRISTIAN COLLEGE GRADUATES
The Taller Girl Is Taking Up Law

"OUR CHRISTIAN WOMEN"

Bhogada Sarma, Teller of Good News, and Her Daughter

ion of her husband. She is not afraid of being divorced. Her children are sent to school. There is still room for improvement in many cases, especially among first-generation Christians, for it will take time to eradicate ideas bred in the bone and for a proper adjustment to new conditions and motives. But it is equally true that life in Christian homes is purer than in the other communities and decidedly on the up-grade.

The finest homes are established by the girls who have been educated. Their homes are neat and clean, there are books and pictures and often a musical instrument. The children are better disciplined. Our schoolgirls are much in demand as wives; the villagers who ask for them realize that they cannot expect them to work in the fields as their ignorant old mothers did. Not that there is any disgrace in working in the fields, but the attitude is symbolic of a new reverence that hesitates in making an animal out of one's wife. When there is need, I am glad to say, our girls do their share in the fields, but they do it of their own choice and not by compulsion.

In the Christian communities the influence of woman is felt and counted upon. She is the most regular attendant upon the services of the church. She has a religious experience of her own, she participates in the religious acts of her community as fully as, and by the side of, her husband. She has a share in and a

responsibility for the service that Christianity exacts. Weekly gatherings of women to pray in the various homes is the rule all over the province. In the Naga hills their only time is at sunrise on Thursday mornings. They lead in turn. Their voices are raised in earnest petition for the same causes that Christian women in America intercede for. Indeed, I have heard them pray for the American women who support the work out here. Splendid prayer-partners they are and, methinks, streams of power are let loose into the lives of the women at the home base because of the intercession of Indian Christian women. They do their bit in giving. At their services of prayer there is always a collection, mostly in rice, for they are not rich. At home, when rice is measured for a meal it is counted out by handfuls, and the tenth goes into the "Lord's pot"—the Indian mite-box. In the course of a week a considerable amount is gathered and constitutes the woman's offering on Sunday morning. It is thrilling to see them stealing up the aisle, their offering in a cloth, emptying it into a basket for the purpose. This rice is sold, a separate account kept of it, and the money is spent as the women direct.

On big festival days the older women mingle with the crowds and present the news of a Saviour to all who will listen. I have known groups of them to tramp many dusty miles in the hot sun along the highways

and across rice-fields to meet with the women of the villages. They come back with shining faces to report how eagerly the women listened and how they pressed them to come again. They may be found visiting the shut-in women of the zenanas. They have such tact, especially the women who are converts from the higher castes. And when the preaching bands tour the villages how the women vie with each other to provide proper entertainment for the preachers!

Christian women, even in tiny jungle villages, raise funds to support girls in mission schools. They recruit children from non-Christian homes for the station day-schools. The older women watch carefully over the younger lest they use their freedom indiscreetly and thus cause unfavorable comment. They take their religion seriously and are jealous of its reputation.

At the meetings of the Associations one session is always in charge of the women. Here one finds who the leaders are. The women at such a gathering are most interesting. There are many who "just sit," as a telling Assamese phrase puts it—being too old and too stupid to understand what it is all about. But they are always there, which, you will grant, is something. There is always a group of mature, conservative women who are apt to put a damper on undue enthusiasm. There is the younger group which has seen visions, whose powers have been tried out a bit, who have the

spirit of daring so necessary to leadership out here. Lastly, the newly trained girls and those still in school, so eager to be of use, and yet so timid withal. There is nothing I like better than to sit among the women at such a gathering. It is the best cure for discouragement I know.

At the big Biennial Convention that brings together all our Baptist Christians, women are assigned definite parts on the program. I have noticed that the reports of the women are always optimistic. They are not easily daunted by difficulties. On the Sunday afternoon when the menfolk go in a body to preach in the bazaar, the women have a meeting all their own. At this time one has the opportunity to present interests of the work as a whole, interests which unite the women of all races and of all parts of the province. Plans are on foot now to organize them into a Home Mission Society, a committee having been appointed to draw up plans and a constitution for presentation at the session in 1928. At the session in 1927 the World Wide Guild was presented, and many chapters have been formed among our girls. Indeed, at one session of the convention, W. W. G. girls presented India's needs to the vast mixed audience, and they did it with vividness. Certainly a new custom is being tried—young females standing up to give instruction to men.

The Christian women are interested in Child Wel-

TILLOTAMA

Assistant in the Normal Training Department
She Is a Hindu

fare and Temperance Work. As a class, they are better posted on methods of prevention and cure than any other. If they were better educated they could do much in the way of publicity work. That is reserved for the present generation of Christian schoolgirls.

The younger women come back from the higher institutions with such plans that often the missionaries must restrain them. Missionaries are always handicapped by an insufficient budget. But the girls are learning ways and means of raising money themselves, and so there is a real progress. If we could help them, what might not these young women accomplish with their vision, their knowledge of their own people and their training! We should be capitalizing on the money spent on their education. We should enlist the enthusiasm of the young people in the cause. We should give the Christians the opportunity to make their contribution.

The young women are producing a literature in the vernacular as yet only in manuscript form, but some time it may reach a publisher. Perhaps some friend reading this will be led to make her over-and-above thank-you gift an investment in the establishment of a literature, for the Christian women of Assam today have little besides their Bibles and their hymn-books, and for the non-Christian women there is nothing.

They are not perfect, these Christian women and

girls. There is much more to be done for them. Some classes have as yet had very little of the refining influences in their lives. They are coarse and uncouth, especially the women of the coolie classes who have only lately become Christians. Others of the more advanced groups there are who do not know how to use their new freedom. But in this all of them are praiseworthy—they do make the most of their opportunities. They are ready to be led. Surely they deserve more than the tag ends of an occasional missionary wife's time. They have many cares, these women, little leisure and little money. They live in an enervating climate. They are handicapped by old heathen prejudices and view-points, by insufficient instruction as to the application of the Christian spirit to all of life. Christian menfolk out here need to be taught to let their womenfolk do more. They so often hinder them. It was this old Asiatic attitude that caused even the great apostle to direct that women should not speak in the churches. I am not pleading for a place in the pulpits for our poor untaught sisters, but for the chance to do the smaller things that count for as much in the long run.

In the hands of the Christian women of the Indian churches lies the solution, in large part, of the problems of their sisters in the non-Christian homes and circles. The present generation now training in our schools

will go farther into the fields of service and be less handicapped than their mothers. The best missionary strategy of the moment is to strengthen the mission schools with workers and funds that they may do what is in the heart of the present staff for the girl women who are so soon to carry the burden of the Kingdom cause among the women of Assam. We shall find it an investment that will bring returns

Bhogoda Sarma—Teller of Good News

It was the weekly prayer-meeting at the Gale Memorial Bible School in Jorhat. This is the training institute for our Assamese Bible-women. The meeting was led by Tiburi Goldsmith, who has for many years been a fine Christian worker. Her husband has been a veritable staff for the missionaries to lean upon, has been a preacher, Bible teacher, and Bible translator for his race. They have a fine family of sons and daughters, all of them well educated, some holding college degrees. These are holding positions in the educational world, and one is a doctor. Tiburi has been their inspiration.

After the usual preliminaries the Bible-women reported on the week's work. The first was a woman of striking beauty and grace. I knew I had seen her before, but it was some time before I could place her. And no wonder, for the last time I had seen her she

was a shrinking, timid little woman who hid her face in her saree when any one addressed her. She and her husband were Brahmins and became Christians during my stay in Golaghat. The story came vividly to my mind. My first glimpse of her was of a swollen-eyed, disheveled girl, sitting on the floor in an inner room of her brother-in-law's house. Her husband had brought her there by strategy, after having escaped imprisonment himself. She was utterly miserable, utterly homesick. She could not bear to eat what was brought her, thinking it was unclean, being Christian food. The very smell of it sickened her. A little later her good sense began to assert itself. One Sunday she came to church with her face covered. She had never before been in a public assembly where men were present. Then I left on furlough and did not see her again till that afternoon.

Her face glowed as she expressed her gratitude that she had had another chance to witness for her Lord. She and her companions had suffered persecutions and contempt. (It is the native Christians who stand the brunt of persecution, not the missionary whose white skin saves him because white skins give prestige. They dare not close the door in his face; rather they close their hearts to his message.) But this beautiful, refined woman of the sheltered life, of India's proudest caste, gloried in what she had suffered.

ANNIE GOGOI AND HER MOTHER

Annie Teaches at the Woman's Bible Training School
Her Mother Is Our Matron

Later I asked Annie Gogoi, the daughter of our matron at Nowgong, to get from the lips of this beautiful woman the story of her life. Annie is herself of high-caste extraction. When Bhogoda Sarma understood that her story would inspire and help women in America she gladly told it, and I give it in the exact, quaint words of the translator:

My childhood home was called Gaurang Goswami's house, for my father was head priest over many Brahmin villages. The people came from these villages to my home when there was trouble of any kind, such as illness or famine. At times they came seeking advice concerning a journey or a marriage.

We were a large family. Besides father and mother I had three sisters and two brothers. I was my mother's third daughter. I never had the privilege of going to school as there was no school in our village when I was a little girl.

It is our religious custom to marry girls when very young, and so my father made arrangements for my marriage when I was thirteen years old. I did not know the man to whom I was engaged. I saw him for the first time on my wedding-day. After my marriage I remained with my mother for a whole year, and then, at the end of that time, I went to his home. I did not like my husband at first because I was a little girl, and I did not know him. He was just a strange man to me. After a year and a half of our marriage my husband was taken with consumption. Priests were called in, and every effort was made to make him well according to our Brahmin customs, but all in vain. I, being very young and inexperienced, did not know how to take care of him. Doctors were called in, yet he did not get well.

About this time my husband had a dream. He was very ill and could not leave his bed. But in his dream with a friend he went for a walk. On the road they came to a place where they

saw a dead man lying across the path and my husband said, "Let us go back," for to pass near would be pollution to them. Again the friend came and said, "Let us go for a walk, for the dead man has been removed." Going together they came to the place where they had seen the dead man lying, and now before them they saw a beautiful house and in it the man. Then the friend said: "When you were nineteen years old at one time you decided to follow Jesus Christ, but you were not brave enough and went back from following him. The dead man whom you now see alive in this house has by his faith in Jesus Christ received a new life. If you follow Jesus Christ again you will live and all will be well; if not, you will die."

Awaking, he found it was a dream, but he decided what he would do. He felt new strength come into his body. He was able to get up off his bed. Then he told his stepmother to pack his box, that he wished to go to Golaghat. He went to Golaghat, taking his little brother with him in case of need. In three days he returned to take me to Golaghat to learn about the Christian religion.

Then there was much trouble, much crying, much wailing. I myself, not wishing to go, hid myself. At that time I did not know what the word Christian meant, except that it was a religion that every one disliked. My husband made many efforts to force me to go with him, but always I said, "I will not go." Finally he gave up trying and went off to Golaghat alone. For seven months he received medical treatment, the missionaries treating him as their own son. The mission doctor also helped by sending him to Shillong, the capital of the province, for special treatment. Again my husband came back for me, and this time, using some force, he got me away from my home and took me to Golaghat. I felt so badly I wanted to kill myself. For days I would not eat anything and consequently became ill. But God was very good to me. The missionary's wife came and urged me to eat. Gradually my mind changed, and through the love and kindness shown me by everybody I, too, came to love Jesus Christ and was bap-

tized. At the baptism I did not know very well why I was being baptized, but I was happy to do it, and my heart seemed lighter afterward.

From this time on I became an eager learner of many things. The missionary sent a woman to teach me to read, and after a while I attended the Gale Memorial Bible School. I had a little daughter, and taking her with me, placed her on a mat, and gave all my attention to learning to read my Bible. In the Bible school I learned more fully about Jesus Christ, and I came to understand what it really means to be a Christian. It seems to me my mind went through a second change, and I saw more clearly what Christ was to me and could be to me through the Holy Spirit.

My supreme joy now is to get my brothers and sisters to follow Christ. It is a joy to me to tell them about Jesus and the wonderful salvation from sin that God has made known through him. My aim is to please my great Friend who gave his life for me. "Freely ye have received, freely give." These words are written on my heart; they are with me always. Pray for me that I may spend my whole life as a Bible-woman in a way pleasing to God and that his name may be glorified through me.[1]

Jointi Zillie—Elect Lady

In the year 1863 Assam was visited by the worst cholera epidemic in its history before or since. Village after village was devastated, men, women, and children died by the thousands, and the surviving, fleeing the cholera demon, left their homes and wandered, homeless and disconsolate, over the countryside. It was thus that Jointi came to us, a small girl brought to the

[1] Read also "Old Daddy's Gift" in *Through Judy's Eyes,* and "Making of a Madonna" and "Pilgrimages" in *With Christ in Assam;* both books are by Miss Vickland.

mission orphanage by her two remaining relatives, a sister and her husband. Jointi was a Hindu child, but as flowers open up to the dew, she received and accepted Christian teaching, growing up into a beautiful young woman, upon whom the missionaries early placed many responsibilities.

All this while a lad, runaway from a stepmother in a heathen home, was growing up under the care of the missionary, the Rev. Miles Bronson. It was thus that the lives of Jointi and her husband were brought together. Theirs was an unusual relationship for those days; from the first their marriage was a real partnership.

In 1875 Dr. E. W. Clark began the great Christian experiment in the Naga Hills—foothills of the Himalayas in the southeastern frontier of the province. It was a hazardous undertaking, for the Nagas were naked savages, delighting in plunder and the collection of human skulls. A beginning had been made by a young Assamese evangelist, and after the Clarks' arrival a new village, Mullung, was opened to afford protection to new converts from perils at the hands of their pagan fellow tribesmen. Later there was a call for Christian workers from the plains to assist in the work of evangelizing the Ao tribe. Jointi's husband was one of the first to volunteer. He was ordained for the ministry at Mullung.

FOUR BHUYAN SISTERS

Sarala, Teacher, Skilled in Weaving; Pushpo, Teacher, Especially Fine in Music and Art; Numoli, Nurse; Lahori, Doctor

Daughters of One of Our Leading Pastors, Now Deceased

Shortly afterward—as soon as it was at all possible for plainswomen to live in the wilds—Jointi joined her husband, and spent many years of service among the Naga people. It was a terrible experience at first for the sensitive, refined young woman, for the ways of the savages were utterly repellent, the circumstances of their isolated lives entailed many hardships, to say nothing of the constant jeopardy in which they placed themselves. But in speaking of those years Jointi never mentioned the hardships. She recounted only the victories. Hers was the pioneer spirit that gloried in conquest.

Later the Mission center in the Naga Hills was transferred to Impur, farther away from the plains, but nearer the center of the tribe. There three of Jointi's children were born, of whom she lost two in the prime of their lives.

Mrs. R. B. Longwell of Impur writes of Jointi:

She was in Impur when we arrived in 1906, and was employed by the mission as the matron of the few Naga girls in the dormitory. After we had been there a few days, she became our teacher in the Ao Naga language. This was our first acquaintance with her, and she won our love and respect by her ability and Christian character. The following Christmas her husband and one daughter left her for their heavenly home, and later, within a few months of each other, she lost two of her sons. She knew the deeps of sorrow, but yet she lived the triumphant life.

As matron of the girls, her evangelistic spirit inspired the girls in her care, and the near-by villages were visited at great risk, not

a door open to receive them. Nothing daunted, the little band held their meeting in the streets, where it was not difficult to assemble an audience. In those places there are flourishing, organized churches now.

She was a teacher in the Sunday school and knew her Bible well.

When I was a young missionary, Jointi's visits were a great joy and help to me. I am glad to give this word of appreciation for this sister in Christ who has now passed on to be with her Lord.

After many years she returned to Nowgong. She became matron of our school, grown from its very small beginnings to the largest boarding-school for Assamese girls in the province. For thirteen years she ruled the family in the dormitory—Christian girls in their formative years, girls representing every race and every locality in Assam. One of them said to me the other day: "Mai was truly wonderful. She knew when to correct us, and when it was wiser to let things pass." She loved the girls, but had an unusual firmness in discipline.

Strenuous as her duties were in the dormitory—often her family numbered over a hundred—she found time to do the work she loved best, that of evangelism. She was first and foremost a missionary. Had she lived in America she would doubtless have become an ordained preacher, for she was eloquent, and her ideas were logical and full of force. She knew Hinduism thoroughly; no question ever stopped her, no argument ever worsted her. She taught me much of Hinduism.

She trudged many hot, dusty miles to reach the women of the villages, and today many old women ask us where their teacher is. "Her words were so simple we could understand them," they say, "and they brought us peace." She preached in the bazaars; she visited in the zenanas; she raised her voice in the tumult of special religious festivals. Once, as we came from church, a band of pilgrims, bound for Puri, stopped as we passed, asking what the singing had been. Jointi stopped in the hot sun and preached a sermon on Christianity to those pilgrims. She inspired the girls to evangelistic endeavor, usually taking a group of them with her on her tours.

She was, perhaps, Assam's leading Christian woman. Locally she led the Christian women, teaching them at their weekly prayer services. She was a deaconess of the church, a member of all committees. At the time of her death she was on the committee appointed to bring about the organization of a Home Mission Society among the Christian women of the province. For that she was aflame with enthusiasm. We thought how fine she would be for its first president. She served on many committees of the All Assam Baptist Convention, and thus her influence extended into many avenues of the wider Kingdom service.

She backed us missionaries with all her strength, thoroughly appreciative when she understood us, and

trusting when she didn't. She was ready to cooperate if it seemed best to carry on a certain line of endeavor, even though she did not agree.

It is a year now since she left us. After a period of intense suffering she departed for realms of higher service. Her last Sunday with us will always stand out in my memory. It was her last conscious day. We asked her if she felt strong enough to have the girls sing. She could not speak—her throat was paralyzed—but she smiled brightly and nodded her head. Her suffering-scarred face was transfigured with an unearthly beauty as she listened, keeping time with a thin, wasted hand, and smiling the while. It was a smile to bring tears. A Christian Ao Naga girl, from the near-by Naga village where Jointi preached so often, and now on the plains for nurses' training to be used for her tribe, and an orphan girl, who had grown up under her training, ministered to her till the very last. It was fitting that these two, representing the multitudes of hill and valley folk Jointi had comforted and helped through a long life of service, should help to ease her last hours. Two more unconscious days she was with us. Even in the last struggle before her spirit was utterly released Jointi wore her brave smile, the smile of one whose life in Christ was one triumphant adventure till the last.

She has gone, but her spirit is still with us. Her

admonitions have not been in vain. She builded well, and on the foundations laid by her, many beautiful spiritual temples have been reared.

The women whom God elects from the Indian races work side by side with those elected from the West, and there is a spirit of fellowship and a bond of understanding that overrides all differences in race and heritage. It is because they hold up our hands that the battle turns in favor of the hosts of the Lord.

XII

WOMEN OF THE GARO HILLS

By Linnie M. Holbrook
Tura, Garo Hills, Assam

We love to remember the beautiful little home just around the brow of Olives, east of Jerusalem, the home in Bethany where Jesus found comfort, peace, and rest. Martha received him into her home; Mary sat at his feet and listened to his words, and it was she who gave her precious gift, the ointment that even today sends forth its fragrance. We love to remember the well in the little valley between Ebal and Gerizim where Jesus, tired with his journey, rested. It was a woman who came to draw water, and he gave her living water that made her forget her waterpot and sent her hurrying away to tell that she had found the Christ.

As a city, or village, reflects the people who live within its boundary, so a home reflects the woman who is wife and mother there. If we wish to understand the women of any people we do well to study their villages, their homes, and their religion before we study the women themselves. So in this study of the Garo women I would first show you their villages,

homes, and religion. Not all the Garo villages are Bethanys, not all the homes are Marthas' homes, and not all the women are Marys, for not all the Garo women know of the Well, or of the living water. There are but two groups of women in the Garo Hills today, the heathen women and the Christian women. To walk through a Garo woman's village, to enter her home or to meet her on the path, is to know at once to which of the two groups she belongs.

There are no cities in the Garo Hills. A Garo village is made of rows and rows of bamboo houses built up on posts, from three to five feet above the ground, and built around an open space. The walls and floors of the houses are woven bamboo and the roofs are grass. Not a nail, a screw, or a hinge is used in building; the material is all tied together with bamboo strings. Saws, hammers, and planes are of no use to the ordinary Garo; his one big knife serves all purposes. The largest house in the village, the one decorated with many carvings, is the young men's house, where all the unmarried men, and boys over fourteen years of age, live and care for themselves. At the outskirt of the village is a small cluster of houses, the village granary, where the supply of rice, corn, and millet is stored. Men, women, and children all work on the cultivation, and to protect their crops from the ravages of wild beasts for six months of the year some

one lives on the cultivation, in a small house built in a treetop, ready to give the alarm if intruders from the forest appear. In the open space, the village common, pigs sniff and grunt around, goats fall over each other in their play, and chickens run wild everywhere. At night the pigs are shut under the house, and the goats and chickens walk up long ladders and are fastened into their houses, little houses perched up on posts to keep them safe from jungle cats and tigers that roam at night seeking their daily food.

The houses of the villages are long and narrow and usually divided into three rooms; there are no windows. In the first room firewood, the big wooden mortar, used for pounding the hull off the rice, and homemade baskets are kept. The second room is the living-room. At the foot of the center post is the abode of the evil spirits; close by the indispensable pot of liquor and the fireplace; there is no chimney. The cooking-pots, dried fish, red peppers, salt in a leaf, etc., are spread out over the fireplace. In one house, on one wall I counted thirty-two skulls of cattle and goats that had been sacrificed—the owner's forefather, some sixty years ago, would have hung human skulls on that wall. Spears, shields, big knives, and drums of various sorts decorated the other walls. A dirtier place you never saw, or a place where a greater variety of insects live. Not a table, a chair, or a rug, not a picture, a lamp, or

VILLAGE HOME IN ASSAM

a curtain in the place. Forks, spoons, and drinking-glasses would look odd in a heathen Garo home. They sit on the floor, eat from the plantain leaf with their fingers, and all drink from the common gourd. The girls sleep in the living-room. The third room is occupied by the lady of the house and her husband.

The Garos are animists. Their hills are peopled with demons, and to appease the wrath of these demons, and keep them pleased, is a tiresome task. There is Tatara, the greatest of all the demons; it is expensive to sacrifice to him, for he demands a bull, a goat, and a fowl, and there must also be rice and liquor provided for a two-days' feast. Saljong too must have a sacrifice before the harvest, for he is the demon who cares for the crops and makes them grow. Without his help there would be no harvest. Goera is the demon of strength; if lightning strikes a tree, an offering must be made at the foot of the tree to guard the near-by homes from harm. Kaljame holds the life of the people in his hands. Sacrificing stones are erected in his honor upon which the blood of the victim is smeared to entreat him to keep the people for the coming year. Nawang must never be forgotten, for he is the demon who tries to devour the soul on its way to Chipmang, the Garo purgatory. Thus we find in front of the houses, at the crossroads, the streams, at the foot of trees and in the fields, sacrificing places, bedecked with cotton and

corn-stalks, and besmeared with blood, a continual reminder of the ever-present demons.

From the day of her birth, until after her death, the demons play an important part in the life of the heathen Garo woman. Before her birth her father made a vow, and as soon as she is born the animal, or bird, is offered outside the house. She cannot remember when she first heard of the demons, for as a babe she is tied to her mother's back, and her mother sits with the people around the camp-fire in the village common. As a child she hears the camp-fire tales of the demons. She listens to what they have done, to what they will do, how to appease their wrath, and what will befall one who comes short of it. She thinks of the demons, dreams of them, fears them, and offers beetles, grasshoppers, and butterflies to them all. As she grows to womanhood, short and plump, but not too stout, dressed in her home-made cotton skirt, with a cloth around her head, adorned with beads and rings, jolly, friendly, and honest, she still does her part to appease the wrath of the demons. With her big knife she cuts fire-wood for the sacrifice, pounds rice for the liquor, and dances before the demons at every village feast.

When she chooses her husband, for the Garo woman makes her choice, she chooses him because he is strong of limb and can throw a spear, for he, with spear in hand, will walk before her, as they travel to market

and back, four- to eight-days' journey, and protect her from the beasts of the forest while she carries the load. But before he can become her husband two chickens must be sacrificed. In the presence of the people they sit on the ground facing each other, and the village priest kills the chickens between them. He watches the way the bodies fall, so as to foretell their future, and repeats, "Certain ones this day have consulted the omens of the fowls." Then there is feasting, drinking, and dancing, and they are married. She is happy with her husband, glad when their children come, whether girls or boys, and kind to her parents in their old age, but whether she works in the home, or on the field, weaves cloth or goes to market, always there are the sacrificing places before her and the demons just around the corner.

When old and weary, and worn with her fight with the demons, they lay her body on the bamboo floor and place a rupee in each hand for the expense of the journey the spirit must take. A basket of rice, decorated with eggs and feathers, a pot of liquor, and a leaf with cooked rice and fish upon it, is placed beside her. A live chicken is tied to one toe, tied with a string that allows him to eat from another basket of rice at her feet. The chicken will be offered in place of the slave of former days, when her body is cremated at midnight.

Women sit on either side of the body, and while others weep and wail they wave long chicken-tail feathers back and forth and croak out their weird chant. They warn the spirit to beware of Nawang and to note well the path she travels, so that when she is released she may return to her mother's house, her inheritance. Under the eaves of each house stand wooden memorial posts, posts with repulsive images of the human face carved upon the top. These posts tell how many souls the demons have claimed from that village. The people sacrifice and then erect one more hideous memorial post. She then goes on to meet Nawang, and escape from him, if possible, and to enter Chipmang, there to abide until her reincarnation.

No, the heathen Garo woman has never had Jesus in her home; she has never sat at his feet; she does not know the Giver of living water; but she knows, without a doubt, that Satan goeth to and fro in the earth, and walketh up and down seeking whom he may devour.

While the Christian Garos work and mingle with the heathen people, they live in villages by themselves. Garo villages are all built alike. The Christians have their young men's house and their granary, and they cultivate the land and live in the house tree, but there is no sacrificing place in their village or field, no ugly memorial post, and no provision for the demons. The

goats are in the fields, and the pigs in their pens. The women have gathered jungle grass and made brooms, and the village common is swept as clean as their house floors. There is a neat little schoolhouse, built on the ground, with a fenced-in garden, where flowers bloom, and the bamboo church, where they worship the one true God and praise his Son the only Saviour of men. The Christian home is poor indeed, if material things alone are counted. There is little in the common people's home that they have not made with their own hands. But, in Garoland, as in many lands, the men listen to the voice of the women, and when the wife and mother has invited Jesus into the home, has sat at his feet and received the living water, that home, though humble, is rich indeed. Instead of the great liquor jar, the Bible is the center of the home; instead of the wall decorations of skulls, the walls of the home resound with voices singing sacred songs; instead of fear in their hearts, there is prayer and praise.

When the baby girl is born into the Christian home mother and father are thankful for the added blessing. As a babe she is tied to her mother's back and her mother sits with others around the village camp-fire; as a child she sits close to her father's knee, and she cannot remember when she first heard of Jesus, for from childhood, by the light of the camp-fire, she had heard of the shepherds and the Babe of Bethlehem, of

the Boy of twelve about his Father's business, and of the Christ who said, "Let the children come unto me." Later, sitting on her block of wood in the schoolhouse, she hears many more stories from the same old Book. In school she uses the mud floor for a blackboard and a stick for chalk and learns to read. She takes leaves from the trees for paper, and on them she writes her spelling-lessons and multiplication-tables, and works simple problems. The few books she has came from the Mission, for there is nowhere else to get them. She hopes that some day there will be a blackboard in every school and needed supplies sufficient for all, but that may be in her children's or grandchildren's day.

She confesses Christ as her Saviour while in school, for under the influence of their Christian teacher, children from both heathen and Christian homes come into the church. When her school days are over, and perhaps before, she chooses her husband. Chooses him because he is a Christian and can read and write, therefore is educated. When the man of God arrives in her village, they stand up before him in church, he reads from the Book and asks God's blessing upon them, and everybody sings, and they are married.

If her husband cultivates the land then he will live with her in her village, but if he is a teacher then she will go with him. Wherever they may make their home she is a Christian and so must forget her water-

pot, for a part of the time at least, and tell others of her Christ. Although she has her husband, and children, goats, chickens, and garden to care for, she can help in the church and Sunday school, in the woman's meeting, and in entertaining the evangelists. She cannot go far from home alone, for the tiger, elephant, and bear may be traveling the same path. She can tell her neighbor of the living water; many a heathen Garo woman has thus been brought to her Saviour. And then, like Mary, she gives her precious gift. What is more precious in India than rice? When she cooks for her family, she takes out one handful of rice for her Lord. Twice a day throughout the year she makes this precious offering. Among the over 11,000 Garo Christians in the year 1927 there are about 3,700 women and girls. These 3,700 women and girls represent some 1,200 Christian homes. The women's rice offering to Christ during 1926 supported thirteen evangelists and thirty-six private schools in heathen villages in 1927. There is a woman's meeting held each week in 148 villages. In these meetings the women pray definitely for the evangelists, teachers, and schools that represent them in the Lord's work. I have asked Christian young men and women, from heathen homes, when they first heard of Jesus, and they have answered, "When the evangelist hung his picture on a tree in our village and taught us," "When the evangelist

taught the children in my village to sing," " When the teacher came to live among us."

When her last days on earth come, the Christian Garo woman remembers that Christ, while on earth, said to those who loved him and who had labored with him, " Let not your heart be troubled, in my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you," and she just slips away to be forever with her Lord. The fragrance of her gift, however, continues to permeate her hills, the hills where sixty odd years ago the name of her Christ had not been heard.

XIII

NAGA WOMEN

By Mrs. R. B. Longwell
Impur, Naga Hills, Assam

In the mountain fastnesses of the Himalayan foothills of northeast India live peoples not quite so "old as the hills," though their generations, quite probably, have been from prehistoric times. A glance at a relief-map or down from an airplane might make one wonder how any people could exist on such barren hills, but the close-up view gives a different picture. On these hills there is vegetation, even forests and food-producing grains. Nature is ever alluring, but it is the people in whom we are most interested.

There are many hill-tribes, and of Nagas not a few. Of some of these Naga tribes little or nothing is known. This chapter is confined to three tribes only, the Ao, Sema, and Lhota. For protection from enemies—wild animals and wild fellow human beings—in the early days, the people lived in villages. Large villages became defenders of smaller ones. The necessity for this protection has passed away though the Nagas still congregate in villages and live on the hilltops. There were long years of strife in Ao land when some prominent

tree in every village was decorated with skulls of men, women, and children. This was known as the skull tree, which signified village courage, glory, and prestige. In many villages the tree still stands, but no such distinction is attached to it. The British Government many years ago put a stop to this dreadful practise.

The houses of woven bamboo walls and thatched roofs are built after one pattern and very close together. They differ practically in size only. The rich have large houses with a large anteroom; those of moderate means, a comfortable building on a smaller scale, while the poor often have merely a shelter and the bare necessities of life. Semas have earth floors except for the sleeping and cooking apartment, which is up from the ground a few feet and has a bamboo floor. The more influential have more bamboo floor. The houses are very low.

The Lhota houses also have the rice-pounding apparatus at the entrance, back of which is the living-room, and the sleeping apartment is beyond this. No windows to clean, but plenty of air enters through the walls. The houses are generally poorly lighted. The house does not of necessity make the home, and these houses, primitive as they are, shelter many a happy family.

Let us accept the kind invitation of a black-eyed woman with neat shiny black hair whose smiling face

bids us welcome to her home. The large living-room which occupies the entire front of the house has a cooking-place in the center made of earth with three uprights upon which the cooking-pots rest. The bamboo floor is strong and compact. Women in Naga land can sit down to do their cooking, for around the fireplace are low benches. There are low benches for seats in other parts of the room, and we are given a seat. The eldest daughter has just finished a very pretty piece of weaving, and tells us it is for her mother. We recognize the garment as the usual skirt worn by women and girls, one piece and to the knees. This new spring dress—for everywhere in the land women and girls are weaving the new garments for the family in the late winter and early spring—has been well woven and especially ornamented with a small square of red wool yarn of very pretty shade which makes a pleasing effect on the dark blue cotton background. Different villages have different designs. The upper part of the body is covered with a jacket as these have become very popular. Many of the girls who learned to sew in school take just pride in making their jackets and in wearing them. Before the time of jackets custom decreed that the married woman need not cover the upper part of her body, but the unmarried wore the usual large blanket folded securely under the arms and around the body. In summer this outside blanket cloth

is white and in the cold season dark blue or black. The blue or black color is home-dyed from the leaf of the indigo plant which grows in the hills and is warranted fast color when properly used.

It is a long process from the ginning of the cotton by hand to the weaving of the garment. This is done by the most simple instruments and is all woman's work. Two smooth stones—the best are to be found in the river bottom, it is said—are used to separate the tenacious little cotton seeds from the raw cotton. Then comes the sunning and fluffing to produce the long strands of soft whiteness which become the little balls of yarn in the hands of the deft spinner. The loom, too, is a very simple one attached to the wall of the house either inside or outside.

This daughter is about fifteen years of age and has attended the station school. Three brothers are the family wood- and water-carriers. They attend school and have a fair share of exercise on the football ground. They have a special care for baby brother who with the two small sisters remains at home with mother. A jolly group they make with sparkling black eyes, round ruddy faces, and plump sturdy bodies.

Over the fireplace is a tier of hanging shelves made of bamboo which might be called the pantry, on which is kept the family supply of salt, tea, sugar, peppers, dried fish or dried meat, as well as the cooking-pots and

A CHRISTIAN NAGA PASTOR AND HIS FAMILY

other household utensils. The main article of food is rice which is eaten three times a day, usually with seasoning of some sort.

It is nearly time for the evening meal. The father has come in from his work. He is the general evangelist for the Ao tribe and does some work in the Sema tribe. He has now just returned from a meeting at the Government headquarters with the officials, one of whom has been transferred to another station and the other recently arrived. Representatives from nearly all of the village churches were present. Before taking our departure he wishes us to see the gift of the new red cloth from the departing official. This is honorary as he is not employed by the Government. He has, however, represented the Christian community in deliberations with the Government many times. One of the older brothers has brought a choice titbit for baby brother, which after showing mother he has given to the delighted wee laddie. The first duck egg "laid today" is given us as a token of appreciation and we say, "Salaam."

Naga women have no difficulties in selecting their hats or footwear, for they need none, but every girl is happy to wear beads, beads, and more beads. Think of wearing fourteen pounds of them for neck ornaments! The women remain girls at heart in this matter of beads. It has been said the husband's wealth and

affection are expressed in the strings of beads worn by his wife. They are her bank account. The following experience is related by Mrs. Clark (a pioneer missionary among them). A blind woman whose husband had forsaken her because of her affliction, and because she could be of no further help to him, came to us one day and said that her house leaked so badly the water ran in a stream on the ground floor. She wanted help to repair the roof. I looked at her ornaments, abundant and valuable, and replied: "Well, if I had that amount of jewelry, I should not live in a leaky house in this rainy season." The tears came to her sightless eyes, and she said: "Memsahib, when I become old and helpless and you are gone, who will care for me? Against that time, I am laying up everything I can, in this way." Here were her bank-notes and stocks, her investments for future needs.

Among the Semas there is a custom of wearing their beads in very wide belts extending from the waist halfway to the knees. These are ornamental and well fitted over the ordinary skirt. Little girls also wear these wide bead belts.

Of ear ornaments there is a great variety—glass, colored feathers, decorated pieces of wood, neat miniature bales of cotton (these are tiny bunches of fluffy cotton put into the three holes of the ear made in the upper, middle, and lower parts), flowers, even empty

spools, safety-pins or a huge brass hook in one ear and the eye to match in the other.

The arrangement of the coiffure is unique. The long black hair, neatly parted in the middle is securely fastened low in the neck by strands of cotton cord, white or black. Brass coil rings slipped into a hole in the upper ear are connected by a cord over the top of the head. Semas and Lhotas seem to omit this last touch, and hair-dressing is not done daily. The Lhota women wear large armlets of brass, metal, or ivory in addition to the usual necklaces which are made up more of large white shells with colored beads here and there. Young Lhota girls, whose hair has been kept short until about ten or twelve years of age and when it is growing out at the unruly stage, wear a narrow brightly colored band of rattan around the head, thus keeping the hair neatly and becomingly in place.

Tattooing is fast losing favor, and among the Christians it is not practised. It is a painful and sometimes serious procedure, done by striking with a small wooden mallet on a small bundle of thorns to make these pierce the skin and let in the coloring matter which is a preparation of the sap of a certain tree. In her leaflet on the Ao Naga Women Mrs. Clark says:

At an early age, every free woman is tattooed; one pair of stockings striped with blue, finished in long, slender points on the calf of the leg, made on the skin, lasts a lifetime; a few indistinct,

perpendicular lines on the chin, and in diamond shape on the throat and chest complete the decoration. After being tattooed, certain kinds of food are not allowed to be eaten, because deemed ceremonially unclean, and thus the diet of women is still further impoverished.

Naga women live much out of doors the year round. Indoor duties are few and simple. Cooking the rice is done simply and well. The hard part is to separate the rice kernel from the husk. A large, hewn piece of wood is used, with two or more round holes, into which a few handfuls of rice are put, then pounded vigorously with a round wooden pole, after which it is winnowed, washed, and cooked. Large bamboo mats are spread in the sun, and the rice is well sunned before pounding; there is a time when it is "just right" to be pounded. The rice is cooked in pots made of clay—the industry of a few villagers where the proper clay is to be found. In many houses, aluminum cooking-pots are now used. There is no table to set or to clear away at mealtime. Each member takes his leaf, bark dish, or more elaborate wooden one hewn out of a solid piece with a standard, or, it may be, an aluminum plate, sits down and eats where he pleases. Ordinarily, he then turns down his dish on the pantry shelf and the work is done. To quote further from Mrs. Clark, "As there is no rule in Naga housekeeping for washing dishes every time they are used, it is perhaps well that

the pantry shelf is over the fire, and that smoke is disinfecting." In the dry cold season the cotton is prepared and clothing made for the year.

During the months of spring and summer, until the end of harvest, the women work in the fields. The heavy work of preparing the ground for cultivation is done by the men, but it is women's work to tidy the fields after the cutting and burning of the jungle. Days of long toil from dawn until dark are their portion, for often the fields are several miles from the village on the steep slopes of a mountain.

The farming implements are of the most simple kind. A bamboo split and bent in the shape of a digging-fork, though there is no real digging, is used by the Sema women, while others have a small hoe with which to break up the top soil. With this in the right hand and the seed rice in the left, the main food of many thousands is sown in the hope of a harvest. The small children remain in the village in the care of grandparents or older sisters and brothers.

There is cooperation and a really good time in spite of the hard work, which is often done in the spirit of song. When the men have traveled to the plain for salt, purposes of trading, or to carry loads for others, the women frequently meet them on the return trip and carry the load the last lap of the way. I have heard their laughter as some amusing experience has been told.

The religion is animistic. The good spirit, of course, treats them well, while the evil spirit must be appeased by sacrifices; in the cases of illness eggs, fowls, dogs, goats, and cattle being offered in behalf of the afflicted one. Doctor Clark in his *Ao-Naga Dictionary* has described the highest type of spirit worship, which includes a feast spread for the chief deity and all his host of attendants. The preparation for this feast by the village priests consumes the greater part of the day. When all is ready the high priest calls upon Lizaba, the deity, to come to the feast prepared, and prays that the village be caused to prevail over all human enemies and over wild beasts, have a glorious name, have bountiful harvests and large prosperity, and that the families may live in safety, be prolific, harmonious, and happy. It is hoped by the worshiping village that the offering made to Lizaba will be eaten by crows, for this is deemed a good omen. In this worship it is woman's part to prepare the cooked rice and to make the rice-beer.

When the entire village turns out to celebrate the victory after the capture of some wild beast which has been a public menace, women also deck themselves in holiday attire with flowers, palms, and "best dresses" to enter the parade which takes place in the streets throughout the length of the village. At the Naga New Year festival which comes early in our month of

May, there is much drinking of rice-beer, beating of the old war-drum with outdoor dancing and clownish performances, in all of which the women participate. This festivity is lost when Christianity takes the place of the former religion. To witness a Christmas observance would show that a higher type of festivity has replaced the cruder form of other days.

Young people are free to choose their mates. There is no caste nor intermediary. The marriage ceremony takes place in the church building if a Christian marriage; if it is non-Christian, the young man builds his house and takes his bride to it when it is finished. Household furnishings are not elaborate; mats, seats, clay cooking-pots, wooden plates, bamboos for carrying water, and the usual utensils for pounding and winnowing rice are supplied.

Christian young people pledge their troth in the presence of the church. There is an impressive ceremony, usually performed by the pastor, special singing, and flowers. A reception follows in the new house; refreshments may consist of tea, hard-boiled eggs, rice with meat, or rice-cakes. One bride-to-be with her expected mother-in-law, other relatives, and friends, had blistered hands on her wedding-day because of the days of rice pounding and grinding to make the flour for the rice-cakes for the festal occasion. The groom-to-be was not a looker-on but took his full share in

the preparation. It was a day to be remembered in the village, for its like had never been seen before in Ao land. Among Semas and Lhotas it frequently happens that the dowry exacted by the bride's parents subjects the young people practically to a life of poverty.

It was the custom formerly for the girls of a Naga family to go to the house of a widow to sleep at night. The widows, often, were women of ill repute. The girls of Christian homes now have their own "rooms" with an organization consisting of older women advisers and older sister helpers. There may be three or four such "rooms" connected with a village church. These girls do all the ordinary work at home and in the fields as well as study. Many attend school, and those who do not, often study at night with the others. They have pride in a neat, well-ordered house. In these choice young women is much promise for the future. This system is the result of an experiment tried by the wife of a village pastor.

Girls are welcome in Naga homes, and the women, especially the Ao women, have all the rights socially they wish. There is no degradation of women. While they take no public part in the village councils or in political affairs and in inheritances have no very substantial share, they are on an equality with men in social life. If a day-laborer were desired on the morrow, his appearance or non-appearance would depend,

A NAGA GIRL

in part, upon how the family consultation ended—whether or not he could be spared.

The Christian women take full charge of their weekly early morning prayer-meeting in every village church, and at the annual Associational gathering which is held in different Ao villages, there is always a section of the program assigned to the women. This meeting is presided over by a woman chosen by the program committee. Marvelous it is to see these untutored village women, one generation out of savagery, with courage and native grace conduct this public meeting which is attended by several thousand people. The Lhotas and the Semas also have caught the idea and the spirit of the woman's prayer-meeting, and while there are very, very few among them able to read even a little, some hymns have been committed to memory in a language not their own, and the Scripture, when read at all, is also in a foreign tongue. Yet always there is prayer voiced in their own language. Groups of women and girls are gathering week after week, each Thursday morning, in houses built for the worship of the one true God.

One result of the Ao Jubilee held in Impur in April, 1926, commemorating the advent of Dr. E. W. Clark, the first missionary to open work in these hills, was the organization of a World Wide Guild of the girls in the Impur Mission Training School. They have

held regular and enthusiastic meetings throughout the year.

There are still regions beyond where no sound of the glorious liberty in Christ Jesus has yet been heard. But with workers reaching eastward and northward over these unexplored Himalayan ranges, and others from Burma and China pushing westward and southward, the day will come when all these mountaintops will resound with praises to our victorious Lord.

In this blessed service Naga women surely will have a part.

XIV

NEW THINGS UNDER THE SUN

Throughout the length and breadth of this ancient land there are whispers of changes and things new. It has become a stage whisper, and it has been heard in the innermost places. The whole country is a vast whispering-gallery, and what is said in Bombay is heard in Assam, India's backdoor province. The whisper thrills one, for it brings news of an inner transformation taking place. It is always thrilling to see life take wings. It brings foreboding, too, and fear. Will the changes add new beauties harmonious with the whole structure of India's life, or will the new be merely exterior decoration, grotesque like the gargoyles on Gothic cathedrals? Will they wear new jewels, or will they reset their own splendid ones in new forms? Time will tell. We believe that India will be true to herself, and that in taking over the new she will keep only the good.

Through the backing of the women, men have reached kingdoms of power and progress. The schemes worked out in the sanctums of men will fail unless they are approved and abetted by the women in the *chubara* next the throne-room. In India today a whisper of

wisdom is being heeded, and women are being given their birthright, that of mothering the heart and brain children of men. To see them rise to every occasion in womanly dignity, to witness the development of skill as they handle delicate matters of a nation's life, to behold the shine of their faces as they respond to the challenge of an expanding life, that is most of all the lure that entices and wins the heart of me.

We were made poignantly aware of the difference of the times with regard to women during our recent Jubilee celebration. For three days we entertained old students and many visitors, among whom at least half were Hindu and Moslem women. I thought, as I sat with the richly dressed non-Christian women watching a basket-ball game, how far the race has traveled in fifty years. Fifty years ago the scene would have been impossible. The prejudiced opinion of fifty years ago interpreted all gymnastic movements for girls as figures in the dance of the nautch. They would have none of it. The aristocratic women sitting with me belonged to a new generation that could appreciate the value of exercise for strengthening the bodies and development of grace in girls.

Fifty years ago it would have been exceedingly hard to assemble so large a group of women, representing so many different groups of Indian society. They watched the games eagerly. The little girls went

through elaborate drills, and the women were enthusiastic.

The women who attended the Jubilee saw the girl of New India at work and play. The modern girl can make her own garments, but she knows also the ancient art of weaving lovely white silk with gold figures in it. The modern girl knows how to sing. She has been trained in breath control and in the correct placing of tones. She knows how to sing in harmony with others, both in English and in the Indian tongues. She plays the sweet-toned stringed instruments of her own land as well as the imported organ. She reads books that were once considered intelligible to masculine minds only. She shows dramatic ability. Drama used to be limited to men actors only a few years ago. How we all sat thrilled as we watched the school girls give as a part of the celebration that gem of Assamese history, the story of brave Princess Joymoti. In equal splendor they gave a pageant depicting the contribution of Christianity to India's life. Then they played hostesses at the reception—and many high-class women took tea from our hands that afternoon—and again at the banquet out on the lawn in the moonlight when women of all creeds sat together to partake of the curries and Indian delectables of various kinds.

We saw signs of a growing group loyalty, so hard to foster outside the family group out here. The alumni

of the Normal Training Department had a meeting one morning, organized themselves, and established a scholarship for some girl with a vision and no means. The group itself represents something new. Fifty years ago schools, such as they were, were taught entirely by men. Women are taking over the schools today. They had to challenge public opinion to enter the teaching profession, and public opinion changed. Today they are not only accepted and respected, but in much demand.

Another sign of the school spirit lay in the fact that in coming to the Jubilee they had to choose between attendance at it or the family gathering in their home villages, for it was held at Durga Puja time, one of India's greatest festivals. The school won in the case of many of our old Hindu girls.

Every day we see signs of the change that is taking place. One morning as I was teaching my class in psychology, just as school opened I looked through the open door and saw a tableau pregnant with meaning. A fine, white-haired, white-bearded Mohammedan gentleman, dressed in the flowing shirt, checkered skirt, red fez and pointed shoes favored by Moslems, was handing over his exquisite little granddaughter to my associate. There is a melting in the heart of even stern old Islam. Here it was handing over the younger generation to the care and teaching of the infidel. It

often happens. Half of our non-Christian girls are Moslems.

And so the doors swing open to the girls of Assam. The marriage age is gradually being pushed back for both Hindu and Moslem girls so they may finish school. Many are in high school. There is an increasing demand on the part of educated men for educated wives. Betrothed girls, married girls, and even widows are enrolled among us. The coming of the widow is a remarkable thing. The old sentence of eternal penance and disgrace is being revoked, for the schools have made room for her. She has proved, too, that she has pluck and brains. In the schools she trains herself for a life of useful and happy service. Some of them marry again; the eddies of that movement are felt even in the backwaters.

Outside the schools women are organizing themselves into clubs for self-improvement. I have sat with them on many occasions and listened to remarkable appeals made by women who have never been in school. They are in the discussion stage just now, they are weighing the institutions and customs of their land and beginning to realize the vast problems that it faces. Later they will be stirred to action as the total of handicap, disability, and injustice of their position grips them. Their ideas will then work themselves out in programs of help and reform. They will have power

in their hands, too. As soon as the English Government ratifies the recommendation of the Provincial Government woman will have the franchise even in the matter of electing members of the council itself. One of our own Christian girls, brilliant, yet flower-like and thoroughly feminine, is the first woman student in the law college of the province. It is taking courage of a high order, and plenty of persistence. In her college days she became acutely aware of the need for legislators on behalf of women, and influential men have encouraged her to prepare herself for such work in the province. There will be a place for women on the legislative council of the Province soon. I trembled for her as she made the choice, but I am not one to cast a damper on one who has visions like that, who has ability and is ready to use it for the betterment of the condition of women and children in this land. She comes of one of our finest Christian families, and she has the personality prerequisite to leadership.

It takes great courage and strength of character even for a Christian girl to launch into public life, where she will have to work with men who are not naturally chivalrous, as we understand the term, and who are little enough to be jealous of any measure of success that may be attained by their woman associates. But Assamese women are undertaking public work, nevertheless. An increasing number of them supervise edu-

SCHOOL GIRL MUSICIANS, ASSAM

cation, study and practise medicine, and work along social lines. The village girls who come to us for normal training are blazing trails for their sisters of the future. Village opposition is tremendous, often resulting in boycott and persecution of the whole family. But most of the young women are true to their vision and win out.

There are changes taking place in the home life of the women, too. I visit in many homes where the woman of the house is the equal and companion of her husband. She does not leave the room when her husband enters nor does she retire to the corner. No, she sits in the circle about the guest and contributes her share to the conversation. There is love in homes like these, and understanding. One such is the home of the Civil Surgeon. His wife is one of Assam's feminists, a college-bred woman and of unusual charm. She is literary, having written many books, and lately finished translating fourteen of Shakespeare's plays. They have two lovely daughters, both of whom are taking medical courses. Once I visited them, and found the doctor and his two girls sitting on the floor on a mat, practising on their *esrajes*. The doctor and his wife chat with me as I eat with them, and there is no constraint in the manner of the wife. She has a great deal of influence, and the women as well as the men are noting the example set.

Across the street from us is the home of the Forest Officer. His wife knows the joys of real comradeship. They are progressive Brahmins. Because of the social emergencies of his contacts with Europeans they have laid aside the caste rules with regard to eating with non-caste people. They have adopted many European ways, they eat together at the same table, they go out for walks together, and she accompanies him on his tours. He married her at ten, and educated her, and she is certainly a credit to his teaching.

I think also of the home life of the Deputy Inspector of schools. When I went to call on his wife the first time I expected to be entertained in the zenana. But she and her husband were both at the door to greet me when I came. We sat together in the drawing-room and chatted over the teacups. His wife is not afraid of him. They have two daughters in our school, girls who will have opportunity for higher education.

It is the fact that there are homes like this in the province that gives us our ideals and hopes for the race and courage for the future. Men and women are learning to do things together, in the home and in public life. There is even social cooperation.

A short time ago I attended a conference on Indian culture. Conferences of this kind are common since the birth of the nationalistic movement. They attempt to preserve and polish up the old cultural treasures and

to inspire the production of new ones which shall be true to the Indian genius. One afternoon was given over to music. I sat behind the reed curtain that separated the purdah women from the men and listened delightedly to an orchestra of some twenty pieces, made up of both men and women of the aristocratic class, seated on a platform in full sight of all present. After the playing of a number, the lovely feminine musicians would retire to their place behind the reed curtain and they lost nothing of their dignity by having been seen by the public during the performance.

Thus gradually among all communities the daughters of India are taking their rightful places. Slowly the best of India's manhood is beginning to realize that there has been a mistake made with regard to the status of women. Men are so often better than their creeds. They are beginning to see contradictions in the teaching of the old lawgivers, and more and more yielding to the wisdom of an old law-book, largely responsible as it is for degrading thought about women in other parts, which in a moment of true inspiration pays a tremendous tribute to womanhood.

> Honor to the faithful woman
> Be by loving husband paid.
> Where the woman is not honored,
> Vain is sacrificial rite.
> Where the women grieve and languish,
> Perish men of fated race.

They are skipping the derogatory parts and find that woman, given a chance, justifies their new-found faith in her. And what is being whispered in the chambers today will tomorrow be proclaimed from the housetops.

I glory living in a land like India at the present time. I thrill to the touch of the soft brown hands clinging to mine for guidance and direction. I revel in the opportunities of sharing the riches of my own heritage.

Mine is a manifold task. It is the task of the artist who touches up priceless old canvases and makes them glow with beauty; it is the task of the excavator who finds beneath the debris many precious and lovely things; it is the task of the musician who gives his life to restoring to mankind old lost melodies and ancient instruments that are still capable of making warm human hearts throb with joy. Mine it is to introduce a new Master for their wonderful loyalty, a new Spirit of power to make life triumphant and effective, a standard of life perfectly lived out by the Matchless One, a hope of a life to come that will reward the striving of the life that now is. It is my glorious privilege, too, to put the daughters of a splendid race into places of power, a power to be felt in the antechambers and given expression in the judgment-halls. Because I believe in the innate fineness of woman, in the instinctive purity and beauty of her, in her indispensability, and that in her hand she holds the key to many

present-day situations in the world of men, I believe that to arouse ambition in the hearts of India's women, to uncover their latent gifts, and to lead them to the Christ who will splendidly use those gifts, will be a service rendered to the world.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Chubara.	A room adjoining the judgment-hall of the Moghul emperors where the queens sat while judgment was being decided. Hither the emperors sometimes retired for consultation with their consorts.
Chuddar.	A coarse, homespun cotton material.
Compound.	The Indian term for a campus or the grounds surrounding a building.
Dhobini.	Feminine of dhoby. The washerwoman.
Kali.	The wife of Shiva, a goddess widely worshiped in Assam and Bengal.
Kamakhya.	The goddess of procreation. Worshiped in Assam.
Krishna.	An incarnation of Vishnu, the God who preserves.
Maulavi.	A Moslem teacher of religion.
Memsahib.	Term used in speaking of a married European woman.
Missahib.	Term used in speaking of an unmarried European woman.
Mosque.	A Moslem house of prayer.
Nautch.	A professional dancer; generally a girl of loose character dedicated to the temple.
Pariah.	An outcaste.
Puja.	Any form or ceremony of worship.
Purdah.	Curtain; the state of being secluded; the zenana system.
Riha.	The drapery part of the Assamese dress.
Sahib.	A European man is thus spoken of.

Glossary of Terms

Shiva.	One of the chief gods, the destroyer.
Swadeshi.	Made in one's own country.
Swaraj.	Home rule.
Tilak.	A mark on the forehead used by Indian women.
Twice-born.	Members of the four upper castes.
Vedas.	Ancient scriptures of the Hindus.
Vishnu.	One of the principal gods; the preserver.

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